

diary of a fortnight

Diving down in quest for Siberian Atlantis

a personal and very inconsistent
contribution to our Communist
future

written in Novosibirsk August 2006

edited as raw material in February 2012, Kiev

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"the diaries are precious...

"Will I again travel eastwards just to
find myself end up with
even more questions than before, not
even enabled to think about answers
to be honest? How long can this go
on?"

but I didn't notice too much

"seksualnoi otkrovennosti", just have

slightly better understanding of your
biography..."

Shirley from Minsk/Istanbul, giving me the
first readers' response I ever got about it
yet (April 2011)

(thanks Shirley for two good clues about
understanding Russian language better and
improving this text, their effect is marked in
the text respectively)

These notes are in some sense the raw sketch
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1. resting under beats of lightening and thunder

Novosibirsk is humming into a cold morning, end of August. I gaze at its concrete immensities from the windows of a painter's workshop, half a dozen stories above ground. My spacious shelter lays left hand of the river Ob, dragging north with immense loads of water from the rainy days behind us. Some Africans, I have been told, would actually say "before us" because the immediate past is sensually so much more present and convincing than our pale projective expectations we call future and pretend to be "before us". In some African languages, the future is actually spatially behind you. I reckon this to be indeed very adequate. In our consciousness, we really do face the immediate past while having future hopefully backing us up, behind us, yet potentially so uncanny, so deceptive, so unknowable.

There is a sensually pulsing past in my body, though, and stripped free of all remainders of bourgeois idealism, with the conviction of a materialist convict to my body only, I know that any key to any future is just in here. Really? You pretend that there is a revolutionary future, something different from selfish Capitalist consumerism? And you pretend that it is actually included (with the help of a sly dialectical transformation) right intrinsically of the sensual fulfillment your body has known from the past weeks? Kidding? Just behind this unshaven, sun-burnt face with all its rat-like senses so terribly awake and fond of life that I would feel slightly uneasy if I myself were the future and obliged to host him? Fortunately, I can say, it is the other way round(<:.

Strokes of lightening and thunder go down on the indifferent townscape of concrete and its distant noise of cars. Socialist urbanism knew how to keep cars out of living and working areas. Though half a mile away, I can feel the metropolitan underground pass in the breaks of thunder. I can tell by a slightly different, more delicate vibration in the concrete continuum connecting every human being to each other in this one and only Siberian metropolis.

Cold rain, cold wind comes upon the town from vast plains in the North. The water going down the Ob now will probably not make it any more to the icy ocean far up in the polar night this year. It will be caught by frosty chills with temperatures hostile to any kind of flow and life, nights which look like the end of the world when seen once from their Siberian insides.

“The Russian situation is ready for anti-Capitalist guerrilla warfare”, said my friend V. yesterday morning.

“But our countryside is different from the Columbian battle-ground. A Russian winter kills you when you have no house. And Russians who do have a house are capable of denouncing you right away to the state killers.”

“1943, Germans lost against partisan warfare because of its civil support in Russia,” I recalled from my history textbooks.

“That is the cinema version of history” my friend explained.

“When we were trained for guerrilla warfare in the late Soviet union one of our primary lessons was ‘avoid to get into contact with this population’.”

I could not help to admit that this would be exactly the opposite of what is really necessary for a revolutionary situation. After some time, it seemed to me that I had

understood comrade V. better. The question of armed struggle against Capitalism, the choice of arms in general, is a side issue. The essential step for the left is to form partisan units, quit the vague contingency of bourgeois careers and left militancy. To my mind, the arms to be taken, the methods to be chosen should allow maximum contact and interference. With the confidence of the 19th century Narodniki, I know that this global population, avoided by Soviet defence strategies, deprived of the control of any means of production and progress, merits a life choice. That is why at the end of this diary, I try to sketch the concept of a commune for militant investigation and scientifically reflected intervention, not the other way round.

Blows of thunder and lightening go down on the concrete loneliness of a Monday morning, which left me terribly privileged in an artist's studio with 8, 80 or 800 free weeks ahead, 20 metres above ground. Another stroke goes down, another blow of cold wind and rain bursts through the windows onto my open senses, so furiously alive with joy and creative expectation. If this is the end of summer, this year, this life, I will not complain. I am ready to harvest. Let us see what.

2. turning a day-train into a proletarian hotel

15 precious years have gone down the drain and the Soviet experience is still more than a set of scattered fragments to be recovered by archaeology. Sitting in a collective sleeping wagon of a train gaining the first heights of the Ural, I remembered the August days 1991 in the working-class

backwaters of Paris. I had run free from school, ceased to be a teen, learnt to keep a garden and eventually to defend a road block of burning cars in the student demonstrations of the French capital. And as if this was not enough to burden a summer, I had chosen to be fatally in love with a comrade from East Germany. On that August morning 1991, when news broke that Moscow is ready for anything, I rode far on a borrowed French bike to get hold of “L’humanité”, not waking up my special guests. A whole group of East German students had made its way to my rural retreat in the Paris plain by bicycle themselves and was living at my workplace, tolerated by my French and African workmates with the help of little payments in our common black cash-box. Throughout the following days, I kept on translating to my Socialist guests the French articles on the Soviet Union from the one and only Communist newspaper available. Just imagine there was no internet at that time, only a funny French precursor called “minitel”, logistically not able to support much more than French dating businesses, not to speak about independent media. My guests with their Socialist socialisation who found praising words even for the “Thaelmannknoepfe” on my work suit listened attentively. Instead of French, they had learned, what I could only dream of: Russian. There was a vague feeling among us that maybe everything returns to what we expected. Maybe, we hoped, Capitalism will not make the race in the end. And I even remember voices predicting that it was time to return to East Germany and join the deserted building site of Socialism. Some of my comrades had travelled to Mongolia and Kazakhstan before, served on the Western GDR border and exchanged shots with demoralised ex-Vietnam units of the US-Army. For them, returning to the GDR meant returning to the East in general, a giant collective full of contradictions but worth

fighting for. All of them had been thinking like that at some point of time, no timely opportunism could conceal that. Socialist loyalties, we thought to feel, might be in force again soon. In fact, we were fatally mistaken and our illusionary forces paid heavily for this.

The thrill of the initial change soon gave way to broad disillusionment when El'cin (Yeltsin) putsches his way to supreme command. Only some days later, I met the chief editor of the Pravda in Paris, literally reduced to the modesty of a 19th century Russian Émigré. He had fled the white take-over of Moscow and used his invitation to the “fête de l'humanité” in Paris to escape the crack-down. His newspaper was closed and delegalised, the Communist party forcefully dismantled and a dictatorship installed in Moscow with nothing but Western sponsors, Tsarist sentimentalities and a offensive primitivism of crude pro-capitalist Adam Smithian neo-liberal theory that made few of us laugh. Speaking with the refugee from Moscow, a man made sensitive and sensible by the disaster of the preceding two weeks, I suddenly and quite inexplicably took to a fancy in this Soviet Union, now that it had made its claim on exclusive working-class representation history. How fatal, such fancy to set in exactly when its material base gets physically dismantled, taken over by the enemy, ridiculed and distorted by their propaganda! In how far does such caprice of affection betray a certain deliberate distance to reality, a dash of voluntarism opposed to materialist wisdom and politically effective strategy against Capitalism? I cannot tell. I know that I had a certain conscience about this ontological problematic already in 1991. In how far can we pin-point our visions to the past? Is that not the mode of reflection characterising positivism, our bourgeois class enemy? What has the Jacobinist fervour of the 19th century,

what has the love for the Paris Commune in the 20th century really contributed to revolutionary progress? 15 years ago, I took two steps out and into this dilemma which were almost ridiculously juxtaposed. I became member of the French Communist party. And, I remember this from the first meetings and exchanges with my new party cell, I resolved to travel... eastward. Precisely 15 years after this fatal August when Capitalism triumphed globally and succeeded in adding a new and formerly unknown sense of bitterness to our lives, I find myself still travelling eastward with love's labour lost. Has a youth frustration turned into a life obsession? Do I actually get closer to the social explosives of collective potentials which countless of my dreams and quests have localised East, behind the East-German border, in East German student homes, in East Polish villages, in the Rumanian Carpathians, in the Polish capital, in Prague, in Byelorussia, in the Ukraine, in European Russia and now finally behind the Ural mountain range? Those dreams boasted of sly technical rationality, humane industrial benefit, evenly distributed by efficient railways. Such dreams were colonising vast landscapes of my mind. They were actively taking refuge in things I got to know about the history of Soviet cultural vanguards, Soviet Communes, worker biographies, founders of Soviet power. Sincerely speaking, this is counter-realist to the extreme. Present Russia and all of its periphery in its wake has been strategically decomposed, forcefully irrationalised and as it seems irretrievably deindustrialised at a speed and scale hardly ever recorded in human history. Will I again travel eastwards just to find myself end up with even more questions than before, not even enabled to think about answers to be honest? How long can this go on?

After passing giant river beds behind Perm our train was gaining height among the endless green wooden slopes of the southern Ural ranges. Passengers were getting more familiar, more provincial and conversation easier. It was enough to say that I had travelled from Moscow to arouse frank astonishment. "So you have come such a long way (32 hours, Vladivostok is more than 120) just to be here in our forlorn little mountains," people asked. Later there might have been a shy question like "But you are a foreigner anyway, aren't you." I have learnt to silence such doubt with a vague geographical reference. "I am from the Baltic sea", I would respond slyly. Nobody in Russia would at first glance understand this to mean actually anything outside the former Soviet Union. Citizens former the former Baltic Republic are not actually Russian in the cultural sense of the word "Rusky", but they are still "ours" in a very comprehensive understanding.

I put my finger on the all-Russian railway map comprising two continents and decided to get off where it had landed. I had a special pleasure to slow down getting my luggage ready on the platform – in the train door, a group of commuting clerks returning home had taken the fancy to flirt with me so that I would get on the train again and make it "at least to the next little town" with them, for "here, there is nothing". I understood that their flirting was inspired by the boredom of a long trip much more than by their acquaintance with me. Consequently, my counter-proposal to spend the forthcoming week-end together walking through rural rain did not encounter quite anything worthwhile to be called enthusiasm. With a smiling and a mournful eye, I finally took to this delightful prospect on my own, searching the next footpath from the platform to the vast adjacent riverbed, when a firm female voice woke

me up with a series of funny questions and proposals. She was standing among a vast heap of bags and sacks, carefully watched over by a big man in military suit. I would not know what this military clothes meant, I could not tell where this woman took her splendid vitality from under the constant late summer rain. But I grasped, that I was just meeting a folk, previously unknown to me – plavčiki, rafters. They wait entire days for trains. They transgress wide stretches of Siberia, carry their Soviet boats, their soviet team spirit and their liquid spirit to the outmost out-back, just to have a ride down untamed rivers. In the following weeks I meet plavčiki-families, plavčiki-summer-communes, plavčiki-invitations, plavčiki-hospitality, plavčiki-snobism and finally and most sadly a plavčiki-widow. Actually after travelling the European parts of this country during the last 7 years, I was not quite prepared any more to see Russians publicly doing anything different from grabbing small occasions for making money or accumulating streamlined commercial prestige or merchants or “otdachnut’ (breath out)” in most petty-bourgeois senses of the polyvalent word. I was being arrogant, because I had no clue about rafting. Rafting takes you out of the ritualised misery of Russian commercial life. Rivers flow for free for the time being. Rafting throws you on your own physical forces, your own physical senses and the power of collectives helping each other, spending the river nights with their guitars and laughing about mosquitoes, lack of food and summer colds. But rafting also probes the limits of escapism. It provokes the Russian macho-stereotype and its military socialisation to flourish, unfortunately not only in women whom it happens to do incredibly good for a change. Men drink, men get drunk, men get into wild water, men drown. Very simple plot, though, it happens hundred of times every season. To be

fair, some die because there are crazy waters in the Siberian out-back. Accidents happen even without alcohol. Exceptions can prove a rule.

Despite everything, there is something hilariously beautiful in the rationality of formerly Socialist tourism. I remember to be caught by the thrill of non-commodity based excursionism in 1994 when my Rumanian uncle announced that with his wife having disappeared, we could now take the kitchen into self-management and eat “tourist-style”. He meant functional modesty, the end of laborious urban conventions, butterless sandwiches to put it in a nutshell. A Westerner would quite probably understand just the opposite. Tourism after life-long Capitalism is rather a merchant to show off. Eat “tourist-style” would rather point at some pumped up cheap exoticisms like pizza, “Indian” or “Chinese” food.

Plavčiki are folks of quite another planet. Some even manage to avoid road transport up the rivers at all, they do it all with cheap trains, spacious enough for their solid Soviet hardware. There is actually hardly any sleeping infrastructure in place for plavčiki, they sleep on river-beaches and railway stations just as the water and the trains happen to carry them.

Once I had heard the voice of that first plavčik woman to step into my senses, I was quite convinced to follow her wherever she was up to. There was such an uncompromising playful ease in her jokes and observations. It took me some time to understand where she took it from – she was actually returning with her folks to Perm after weeks of wild and austere life on the waters. And then she would whisper the formula for happiness into my ear and it

went “Kyn-Zavod”. Behind some bushes, she made me understand, another train was waiting which I had not noticed before. Now it was high time for it to depart. Its final destination being nothing else but “Kyn”, I looked into her eyes. She nodded. So, I took my legs into my hands and my luggage between my teeth to run for my life and the promise of happiness and catch the departing train. Behind me sounded a laugh which had become all too familiar within those last 9 minutes on the forlorn rural platform. Still days later, I would hear her laughing, it went through my head and breast like the most beautiful invitation to Asia I have ever been offered, even when it had already dawned to my mind after some incredibly restless days and nights that at least this year “Kyn-Zavod” would never be reached by me. But that is another story, the one of chapter 3.

I was in a strange fit of humour in this train to the middle of nowhere promising “Kyn-Zavod”. An excursion of youngsters was sitting around me with one boy bursting out into hysterical laughter every now and then. Gils not older than 12 would flirt around him and make him physically explode with shyness and pretended strength. This was actually pathetic to look at. Here sat I, three times older than him and the only faculty helping me more than him was to direct those spasms of unfulfilled love into myself so that they would not burst out so disagreeably. There was another boy sitting diagonally, astonishing sad-looking, maybe two times older than the young helpless annoyance. Through my commiseration, I would actually consider to shut the young one up. But the elder one took up the task and asked offensively what these laughers were about. So I could take to moderating and suggested that our young colleague was probably in love and did not know

what this meant. "So what", the elder boy retorted still offensively, "come on, you are even some 12 years or so of age." The young one nodded ashamed. "With 12 he practically knows everything about love already, doesn't he? So why is he laughing so stupidly all the time?" The younger one agreed that indeed practically he knew everything already. And I just wanted to turn the scene into something more pedagogically instructive and ask for example about the use of condoms in different generations of Russian youth. But the agenda was in the sad one's hands now. "What do you think?" he asked me. Why me? I decided to do something very unRussian and tell him everything I actually managed to grasp of my thoughts in that moment: "For the last half hour I have been thinking that you look quite unhappy." "Is that what you were thinking about?" he asked back as if seeking reassurance. I said yes. Without pathetic gestures or words, he then virtually stepped out of his cool and tight demeanour as if out of a cold shower. I looked at him with new eyes. Suddenly, he had begun to burn with interest. How can you talk like that? It is not what you would normally talk in our trains. We spent the rest of the trip looking at paintings, commenting only them. On the one hand it was as if enough sincere sentences had been said and everybody was musing on their impact. On the other hand, we knew that if there was need to say more, nobody would have any reserve to say what came to his mind. Leaving the train, the two parted as if they were my friends.

Arriving at the station of Kyn, I was all awake with delight. There was such a clear evening breeze of mountain air going through the heights of fir trees and between the wooden huts, an air of calmness and chilly summer idleness set in on our minds and conversations. I had strong

memories of early childhood. When I was 4 years old, my father lost his work and we made a step familiar to most Russians, but quite a horror to me nowadays in my situation for example. We moved out of town to a village in the northern mountains to live with my grand-parents. The clear mountainous air, the high fir-trees, the change from rumour to quietness and the long, long trip were physically so alike on my senses that I was hit with wonder. The world around me was entering through such paths into my consciousness which were already familiar to me. Still, what made me almost cry with surprise: these paths had not been in use for 3 decades! Suddenly, I remembered what we had been eating on an early summer day in 1976, my sister and me. I remembered how I drew with my sister on a big white board with sharp pencils. Today I would tell from my sensual memory that the pencils were HB, but I could be mistaken by some degrees. Including my whole childish body in the game, I lost a brow from my eye and subsequently drew a burial site for it on the board. The pencil line was quite alike the line of the bending dead eyebrow. The sun was shining brightly on the board, it hurt in my eyes. Contrasts were as sharp as the clear air. This was not the familiar place. This was something new. For my grand-parents this was home. One evening they were sitting all silent. They both watched a flower, a blue flower. This flower had a meaning in their lives I could not know. It was connected with a political prison sentence, three years in jail in the leaden times of the 1950s. I did not know that it was possible to sit silent for, well, for hours as it seemed. I started crying, my sister was living far away then.

The important observation I could make from these memories of more than 30 years ago besieging all my senses now was how important it was for me to do things

in accordance with my elder sister, even travelling. A year earlier than painting the white board, we had taught ourselves to paint grass with different colours of green and different movements of our hands. Writing first single letters, listening to blackbirds in spring, speaking about the war which will be, all this was a collective exploration. When we were still living in the town of Stuttgart, my sister and I saw war-planes over Lebanon on black-and-white television and we were very afraid. I clearly remember two war-planes on the screen. We felt close to the end. It took our parents some effort to calm us. They said that Lebanon is far away and that the war will not yet come to us tomorrow. A third of a century later, we see similar pictures from the same places. My understanding of the war has not progressed or changed so much from the one I had developed then with my sister. Just some more specific arguments joined the line of associations. (We did not really believe our parents and their calm, their talk about “far away” still meant that there was war). My feelings even do not seem to have changed at all. How strange! Maybe my memory is prey to determinist manipulation.

I write about my sister attempting to characterise the self-assurance with which I lobbied myself to sleep with the conductresses of our little train. Having no place to pass the night under a roof in the little settlement, the female collective had long ago taken to heating up one wagon and sleeping there together. The atmosphere of erotic tension came later, came and went without changing our relation of trust. Our evening began with quite a work-load. We cleaned the wagons. After all my idle travelling, I had incredible sensual pleasure to wipe the floors of the Platskartny common sleeping wagons. I sang and danced doing the work. The floor of these wagons is actually very

detailed and complicated, with 10 niches for 6 to maximum 9 sleepers each. There seems to be a Russian system of a small steel bar constructions holding your wiping cloth. For larger surfaces, the width of the tool would be ineffectively small but in a railway wagon it is perfectly adapted to all the holes and tiny niches which need cleaning. It was interesting for me to learn that every desk, even the luggage places are being wiped after a day's journey. There is a complicated system of using clean, dirty, dirtier and disposing of dirties water. An incredible mass of objects and garbage can be dragged out of each wagon. The heating oven, not the toilet as I thought, is the central operational unit for all domestic tasks, disposing of garbage, waste-water, collecting bottles which can earn some money for returning them, drying and storing the cleaning instruments. After a long evening, we had great pleasure to sit by the open samovar. The fire was lighting our table and the faces, I began to draw. Outside, a big industrial saw was working throughout the night. "They work in three shifts", the conductresses assured me. They spoke with a very familiar tone about fellow workers of different trades. In European Russia, wood does often not even get basic processing. Most of the harvest is transported to Finland as raw material and returns to Russian consumers as processed boards with Western prices. We started to talk about the railway trade union and their wages, about AIDS and condoms, about technical possibilities to sabotage trains on the Transsib connection in case of need, say for a revolutionary situation. We discussed about gender roles and personal relations with male machinists on the train who slept in a separate place though one conductress had been heavily flirting with one machinist assistant that evening.

The female director of the wooden railway station of Kyn had an interesting conversation with my landladies. She said, she would put me up in the train station which was officially closed over night, but it was too cold there to have a nice sleep. The conductresses retorted “But when we molest him sexually in the night he will then speak badly about us Russian folk.” I asked if their hospitality could be a problem in a control and they assured me that they do have a very tight control on any controller sent to them. So I was confident to stay. Everybody had a good laugh at my poor efforts to portrait them. With singing and playing tunes on the recorder flute the night progressed swiftly. There was some interest in my had-sawn trousers and the pretext was good enough to finger-test some of its sewing details not omitting all the flesh and bones within them. In consequence, the collective resumed that having to get up for work so early in the morning there was no use to engage in any love-making any more. So we slept quietly and warmly until early morning duty woke up the more mobile part of the collective. Others lay on their desks and made up poetry like “Oh, how I love to sleep in the morning. Martin, why did you not visit us a bit at night?” and so on.

Secretly, I marvelled at the sovereign mode of socialising and dealing with sexuality the proletarian collective had put me up with. It was quite different from the middle class neuroses, I have got used to encounter and I still do encounter in myself. Somehow, I was quite confident that there were less unwanted pregnancies with such a proletarian and factual sexual socialisation, than in the painful bourgeois relations, I have witnessed and created myself. As to pregnancies, in our train it was just good for a general laugh to find out that with 35 years of age, I have

not even been able to coax anybody into a wanted pregnancy, forget about boasting of unwanted ones.

Anyway, there was no reason for me to talk badly about the Russian working folk, even if their interests had been slightly less poetic and somehow more factual.

There are precious examples of self-determined sexuality in female working-class collectives. Florian and Znaniecki collected life-stories of Polish peasants migrating to pre-World War I Prussia for seasonal work. The Prussian latifundistas organised special trains to direct the stream of migrant labour to their benefits. Other than the trains for bourgeois clientele, these poor people trains run and stood waiting for days and nights on end. The two early sociologists happened to come across records of female collectives quite deliberately making use of male companions for their own sexual notions of pleasure and desire during the trip. They were not only sovereignly distributing sexual partners among them, but organising the use of the wagon space according to their collective female interests and their specific notion of smaller group intimacy. Comparing this account with e.g. the portrait of female migrant worker sexuality given by George Orwell, e.g. in his “pot-boiler” (that’s his own words) “A clergyman’s daughter”, he appears to have quite missed the point. (He is a bloody macho anyway, the opposition in “1984” is betrayed by a woman, his own wife doing more serious political work in revolutionary Spain than himself is a persona non-grata in the action of “A homage to Catalonia”, “Coming up for air” searches for revolutionary class coalitions to the detriment of ‘the female race’, “Keep the aspidistra flying” glorifies sex which is unpleasant for a woman as family-founding, “The road to Wingham Peer”

chants the tune of good old working-class patriarchy. Similarly in 1920, Florian and Znaniecki published their source on female sexual agency in their American edition under a strict commentary evoking something like the “absolute moral degradation of some fractions of the migrating workforce”. More individualised sexual relations, e.g. between a male Polish migrant and a married bourgeois German landlady were not commented this way. Maybe the main reason for moral indignation by the male researchers was actually not free sexuality in general but more specific female working-class sovereignty in sexual affairs. In the Polish edition of 1974 the passage seems to be suppressed altogether.

In a broader sense, the first female working-class collectives earning their own money in the rice-paddies of Northern Italy have left some instructive tales on new discoveries about making love in the “canzone delle Mondine”. Bourgeois Petrograd women’s rights activists published alarming notices on the sexual agency of Ukrainian migrant woman working on Crimean tobacco plantations. They were economically forced to produce the dope for men dying on the battlefields of World War I. Why is their unconventional freedom of sexual choices generalisingly discredited as “prostitution” by their Petrograd class rivals? (This observation is the fruit of a week of study by my comrade Vlasta in Moscow archives while the sun was rather inviting to have a swim, thank you for sharing the information).

Analytically, I reckon it to be not too difficult to draw a dividing line between promiscuity and genuine sexual liberation. In practice, one of the most prominent indicators of genuine sexual liberation seems to be that

though nothing is prohibited, there is actually no stress on making love to the detriment of other forms of social intercourse. And for this reason it might actually never take place, so what? This is a real problem only for Catholic population ideologists. They together with the pornographic industry are the one and only obsessed with sex, for they have instrumentalised it without reserves. This is the secret message of our last book *Kalinka*. I guess that some 90% of the people receiving it this summer and not reading carefully enough understood our cause just the other way round. Now, they might think of us editors as a bunch of strange missionaries. Just as that pathetic Polish director of a railway restaurant car on our way to the Athens social forum. When he saw the *Kalinka* cover page on sexuality and anti-capitalism he positively thought this enough a motive to call an ambulant police unit into the train and get the foreign parasites out. Luckily, our comrades working on the Russian railways have a slightly more progressive socialisation in this respect. 28 more years of historical socialism (sorry folks, this is a complicated one: from 1917 until 1944 and 1989 until 1991 minus the year 1920) do seem to make a difference, even if it is 15 to 79 years back in time.

3. steps into Asia

Any reader who has some sense of what goes on in Russia will positively marvel how on earth I do get only the chocolate side of the disaster. To be honest, I have not told about the other side yet. Strindberg, Munch, Brecht and Seghers have taken great pains to recreate artistically how much people can hate you for having made love to them

and not really meant it. But who has documented the consequences you face for not making love and meaning it? One ticket collector on the train gave way to all her doubts on my character and thus painted a vivid portrait of Russian conservatism in action. "You told us, you will not only dance on our tables but also start to cry when we fill you up with coffee. That means that you are a weak one, you cry. I have heard that artists' natures tend to be weak, degenerated somehow. And you put on your t-shirt the other way round. Your shoes do not look proper either. Why have you wiped the floors yesterday? You are a Cinderella type. Not a strong one. Maybe you are gay altogether. You should be going by car. You are a loser if you take the train. Anyway what do you look for in this country bumpkin hole? If you were serious, you would be in Moscow now. Why did you ask us about sabotage on trains? You might be a terrorist. Anyway, you are a travelling type. That's the sort which contracts AIDS first. How disgusting to sleep with such a person, even if you use a condom. That's not what I love. Your painting stuff is a failure altogether. You have been drawing us for hours and there is not a single resemblance. Why did you not give me my portrait as a memory? There were addresses written on the back side of the pages? I understand now: the address of your girl-friend. Maybe you are even married. Take your luggage now. Don't stand in my way. There are some people who work, however. Our train is to leave in half a minute. What do you say? I get a copy of your sketches, also the one when I posed for you on the bench? You do not believe yourself. You will forget about me as soon as our train goes off. But if you come, I will quit smoking and we buy a little stretch of land in the mountains and we will raise our own potatoes and my two children and we will be..." The train went off. I would not bet my head. But the

last word might have been “happy”. I took my luggage as I had been told. It was quite heavy. I noticed that at least. I walked off into the direction I was vaguely instructed to bring me to Kyn-Zavod after some 15 kilometres. Quite close for the Ural mountains. For a moment I paused and considered to buy some food, but it would have been several hours for any village shop to open. In my mind Moscow and local time collided unadvantageously. I took the first opportunity to leave the track I had been told to take. First, heading to the left, I then turned to the right, two more times to the left and then I followed some paths deeper and deeper into the hilly woodlands until standing before a bush of raspberries and realising: “Dear colleague, you are physically, morally and politically destitute. You have nowhere to go. You do not even know what you look for in these damned forests plundered of their saleable hardware. Your luggage is heavy like hell. Your talk is empty. Your feelings are useless. Your Russian is evidently unconvincing. Your questions on trade-unionist perspectives have been insufficient. You haven’t even had the guts to talk about whom they would surely have called your girl-friend. You should have painted portraits in oil on canvas and not with pencil on address books. You should have asked them more about sexuality and fulfilment, concepts of happiness, education of children. Once in 5 years you have such a free discussion and all you seem to be worried about in that moment is that there is only two condoms in your pocket, they have been there for weeks now in critical vicinity to the sewing needle and it’s not even you who bought them, that your underwear could hardly be in a presentable state any more and your toothbrush had got lost two night-trains earlier.” All the while, I was eating raspberries, sweet red dots of delight on the black seas of my miseries. After having eaten more than

a kilo or so and swallowed additional loads of self-hatred alongside, I decided the following. “You have not really slept well this night. You should try to find something different to eat than raspberries the next days. You should better not get lost in these forests. You should rather not sleep in the open air. Already the days are terribly chilly up here and the nights will be hell. By the way, better you will never write or tell about this last night, really about these trains altogether. Funny, trains have been for the Russian revolution what ships have been for the commercial revolution. And individual motor traffic for capitalist restoration. What is the flagship of feudalism? A horse, well. Would not mind a horse now. My German friend Carsten, whom I have invited to go to China with me said he would be more selective and just take the horseback experience on the tracking part Kazakhstan-China. And the slave society? What is their trains? Individual hand carriers. See how Capitalism longs to restore slave relations. Under every car a bunch of welders is tight to weld above their heads, 8 hours a night shift, 6 nights a week. And you collapse after a single night in proletarian workmates’ company. By the way, why is Marxist history writing always so schematic? At times it even gets worse than the Agitprop train-slave car story you made up some raspberries ago. Dialectically materialist history should be the best writing in the world and all you manage to read of it appears just dry stuff. To be honest, the worst things you have probably ever read is your own stuff. What a good luck for them that people are generally reluctant to read anything of it. In 1986, I overheard a very nice conversation in an Australian school library. ‘I have done a homework on German history.’ One started. ‘Should have been 10 pages, t’teacher said. Fuck it, I did it on half a page. Actully, German history is an easy one. Germany was not a bad country when there was still

Charles the great, you know. The trouble started when his sons divided it in two. See now, today, you have East Germany and you have West Germany. That's bloody hell. More than thousand years, just because of these two brothers'. 'I always wonder' the other responded without responding, 'how do these dicks actually write those books? As for me, I have even trouble reading books. Well, I read the spelling dictionary once. Honestly, in half a night I came to the word 'Absalom'. Don't laugh that was a hell of a lot of reading. The problem about writing books. Well, I could probably write some hundred pages. You can just copy from other books, I have heart. The real horror is that they always cross out two thirds of what you write because it is bull-shit.'

These two Australian boys seem to have become the two guiding stars of your pathetic attempts at saying somehow something important after 28 years of study. The first one stands for your historical research, the second one for your writing altogether. Painting, writing, fighting, you are only making a fool of yourself, while your former friends raise children, pay into pension funds and edit clever articles in revolutionary journals." Strangely enough, sometimes, I chance to have quite a lot of ideas. At other times however, one and a half ideas torment me for a whole day and nothing else turns up. Well, to be honest, two mushrooms turned up. I know now, that I should better not have eaten them. They seemed to fulfil at least one of my resolutions: to eat something different from raspberries in the end, while a proper place to spend the night seemed further away than anything I could reach by foot. And there was nothing than my feet to give me a lift. I strolled along rivers, then started to cross them. First I kept to mountains, than I tried to follow valleys. I am not really ignorant for things

like south, north, the position of the sun at different times of the day, polar star, proper shoe work, changing socks and keeping track record. But this day and the following ones, everything failed. There was not a living soul turning up and my last strategy to walk in the direction of faint dog barking which I imagined to hear behind the horizon also seemed to somehow miss the point. To cut a long story short, I had got lost. Later I learned that I had got to Asia that way. But even that would have been of little consolation in the nights I then had still before me.

4. raspberries and more plavčiki

There did turn up a trail of a car through the wilderness when I was restlessly wandering through one of those nights trying to control the shivering of my body from frost, malnourishment and dissatisfaction with stern walking movements. I was not in a position to be snobbish about cars any more, to be honest. I clung to this path as to an anonymous love letter. Pulling together all my remaining wits, I managed to analyse the following. A car trail has two directions. If you follow one direction to the end, you arrive at a production plant. There will be workers and there will be something to eat around. On the other side of the trail there will be a car cemetery. There will be some kind of human beings around even there or vultures and they as well will have things to eat they have left over, just as the corps of a car never really gets ripped off to the end. Then the doubts set in. Maybe this is a hermeneutic circle. We only notice cars which have not completely been taken apart. Those which have been taken apart to the last screw are not perceptible any more. It's likely to this bourgeois mourning of "Why is there no lively proletarian literature?"

If you would grant proletarian writers a room of their own and faculties to publish and interest audiences to read them, you might notice in the meantime that the chap does not really write to the benefit of your class interests. Your tastes will be insulted and your generosity will feel exploited. That is how you make proletarian voices disappear from your mind-set. I stood still and felt my nerves shake my body with horror. Maybe I have taken the dead direction of the car trail and it will end right away in one of those pittoresc deserted valleys which once have been kept and looked after by Kolkhozes. See, they as well have disappeared to the last screw. Only on their vast meadows, meadows of thousands of hectares an agronomist eye can see that the bushes and small trees are not much older than a decade and some plants flowering there still betray superb soil fertility, which is the result of women's and men's toil, socialist toil on such sour locations as these ones. I saw the car trail in the moonlight suddenly disappear. The car had stood there some weeks probably before the vultures had found its corpse. Then everything happened very quickly. The last fragment of metal was kicked into the nearby river, that was it. No, the trail continued. Maybe we had taken the other direction towards its birthplace. But hark. Do you really think there will be any factory any more? Maybe there is just ruins like in those places where Socialist industry had been producing for socialised needs and not for the sake of individualised grabbing. Take the Crimean peninsula for example. In a couple of years more, they will have taken down even the concrete ruins. You know, if you bang a steel hammer on concrete long enough, some metal pieces will eventually stick out. Getting some kilo of these to a metal shop, will at least assure you to be able to get drunk for the following hours, because they sell the metal to China where they build houses in kilometre dimensions.

There has been no El'cin in China, that has made a difference. What do you grunt? Tien Amen? Do you know the official number of demonstrators shot in Moscow in 1993 when El'cin shelled the parliament, dismantled the informalist self-management of living areas, and ordered to shoot on any civil person approaching the butchery? Officially they killed close to a thousand victims during this "chirurgical strike (NATO type)". Unofficially, you can assume that Beijing Tien Amen 1988 and Moscow White House 1993 are on quite a similar scale of brutality. That is for the military intervention. Capitalism however has a supreme capacity to deprive and kill with most civil instruments. Just note, that the average life expectancy of a Russian male citizen has dropped by 8 years in the last 15 years, precisely speaking from the point in time when Gorbachov's campaign against alcoholism was called off. In the 1820s the free forces of the Capitalist world market could crack Chinese self-sufficiency only with the help of opium and the opium wars. It is true that you do not learn much useful details about German history in Australia. But at least you get a sensible introduction into Asian history. Want to hear it or not, in any Australian high school you learn that the British military operation to force China opening up to British Indian opium import cost 20 million lives. This was the epoch of the European Romantics. Europeans got very emotional on hearing about the cruel destiny Greek-Bavarian monarchists endured when getting some beating in Ottoman jails for their practices of criminal piracy. While opium has slipped out a bit of control in the Capitalist world market. Alcohol seems to be the perfect civil weapon in the Russian case. Just notice that female heavy drinking in the former Soviet Union is a specific phenomena to the happy few who have made their day, accumulated grants, gone through American

sponsored leadership seminars, communicate with their children through the meagre payroll of their nanny. Alcohol eats up the male part of Russian society from below with the assistance of ubiquitous gamble machines, risky sex and military manliness. Alcohol eats up the female part of Russian society from above with the assistance of systematic gender discrimination cemented to a genuinely racist system of assault, sexual aggression in literary all public spaces (not to speak about the private ones) and exclusive burdening with childcare as soon as a pregnancy is confirmed. To be successful in such a society you have to forget effectively. To industrialise your selective ignorance, there is no better fluid than alcohol at disposal. I hate all the racist talk about “mentality” and “tradition”. Bullshit! Its bloody structural violence and alcoholism is the reaction, the last resort, the false friend – still a friend, where even friendship is out for grab. I once spent a night in a Pskov police station. I had been seriously beaten up for money. My left eye was bleeding. I would have genuinely appreciated my burglars to give me let’s say 10 seconds to get off my glasses before beating into my head. But they would not take the trouble. After shaking hands with me amicably and moistening their fists with artisan calm and care in a greasy street pond of old Pskov, they would beat straight away into my face, into my glasses. One glas broke and tore a scratch right along my left eyelid. There were not many millimetres left to save my left eyesight, I was told later. That night, I felt safer in the police station than in the Russian public. Today, I know that my feeling was a dire illusion. There is no reason whatsoever to trust Russian police. They will assess your situation professionally and then, based on their knowledge of your resources, they will try to squeeze as much out of you as they can. However, during the whole night, there were women coming to the

police station. I have rarely seen such brutal traces of beating, rarely heard such panicking voices and desolate sobs as from my female fellow victims in the hands of the police that night. It was in that night, I had a first real insight into the scope and scale of Russian domestic violence. These women knew what they were risking in handing themselves over to the police. They went there nevertheless. There is a choice between Black Death and cholera which definitely lets you choose cholera.

Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno was damned right in tearing Strauss' musical falsification of an Alp morning into pieces. The main insult to our senses, he argued, is that the Strauss morning comes out triumphantly, as a proud piece of bourgeois commodity. Mornings never do come out triumphantly. The only form we know mornings to grey in our times ("grauen" the German word is synonym to "horrify") is with the ridiculously modest hope that only once it will not get darker any more. And that is the mode in which a Ural night turns to an end. There are seemingly endless hours of greying. No colours, faint black and white. If you have Moscow time in your senses you loose hope altogether. This is not the morning. This might be polar light or something the like, you think after three hours with the temperatures still dropping and dropping. Yet there is an end even to that. And there has been a happy end to the car trail as well. It lead to something like a trail eventually used in two directions, this lead to something like a way, this lead to something like street. Well, not a street. Raw concrete elements laid out in two long rows of kilometres and kilometres and kilometres to fit under a lorry. Cars have to improvise with the mud in-between. It took me half a day to be able to study the kind of travelling taking

place on such Russian main connection roads, for the first vehicles choose to appear quite late that day.

And still, they would not bother to give me a lift. They would just stop to hear my story. It is terribly boring to travel by car on such lengthy, lonely roads, so you stop at every occasion, with occasions only popping up with hours and hours of distance between each other. Hence people halt, get down their drivers window, lighten a cigarette and start to chat. Do not use all your hope to inspire your talking and lobby yourself into their vehicles. In Russia, you have to be a sovereign economist with the rare and vulnerable material called human hope. Only throw a little bit of your precious resource at such a chatterer. He will probably not let you in once he has finished his cigarette. And you need some genuine hope inside of you once you decide to walk for hours and hours behind the dust cloud that driver has left you walking in. Thinking back now, I realise that I did not get any lift to Kyn. I did not even make it to sit in a motor vehicle this whole week. I made everything by foot. The reason, why I hardly noticed this default and why my memories of these endless walks along a straight double-concrete trail to the horizon just to discover that there is another infinity stretching to a consecutive horizon is quite simple. I chanced to meet two farmers. Yes, I met two farmers. In the beginning I would not believe it myself. There were actually to men working on a meadow to fish something like hay out of the pouring rain. I started talking to them as if to myself. But they would not socialise like that. “Lad, sit down with us first!” Indeed, how can you start a conversation standing when there is half a hundred kilometres of emptiness around you. So we sat and we looked at the fir trees on the other side of the meadow. I had been walking a lot. I had forgotten what it meant to look at fir trees. I literally rediscovered them

with the help of my new company. “Where do you want to go”, the elder peasant asked slowly after a while. “Kin-Zavod” I answered economically. The less unnecessary words you make, the later they understand that you are an alien. And thus, you might chance to get a glimpse of real talk. “Kin-Zavod is over there, but it is quite far”.

Something was going through my body, but I did not yet know what. I turned around to look into the direction my neighbour on the hay had indicated. It was exactly where I came from. And now I heard it clearly, it was a laughter, not mine. It was the laughter of a woman shaking me, shaking my bones, my wits. So, after all this I could still laugh at myself. That meant I was alive, healthy. Give me three days of rest, a bed, some light food, not too fat and I will be socialisable again. I was overwhelmed with joy. I collected my new spirits and made an explorative request myself.

“And where is Kyn railway station?” I asked. “That’s a little closer” both replied amused, “over there as well, same direction”. This was it. I had a direction to go. I had some kind of train taking me to Sverdlovsk in not too far future. Everything superficially necessary for me was resolved, so I could turn to the essentials.

-“What are you doing here” -“We make hay” the elder peasant replied. He had a massive scull and a broad throat. His clothes were practical, a lot of linen, tough.

-“Isn’t it a bit wet for haying”

-“Won’t get much dryer before autumn, probably.”

-“So what do you do with this filthy hay then?”

-“Feed my cow.”

-“How come this is a meadow and not a forest as all the kolkhoz lands?”

-“That’s my work, lad.” The older one replied and looked at the younger one. “Thirty years, I worked on this patch of

land. It was a forest then. Now it is a nice piece. A week ago, I mowed it by hand, now we collect the remainders of the rains to one heap if we find a dryer moment these days.” “How did you come here,” I asked with a slight uneasiness. “By foot, just as you” they answered. “But how do you take the hay to your cow then?” “Leave that problem to the winter. Now we make a heap of, let’s say 4 metres. We put a flag-pole on it. Then we will know where to dig the snow in winter and get down to the heap.”

I laughed at my new friend, he laughed at me. We were comrades in arms, fighting the battle for realism against an empty post-modern petrol bubble. The realist method, as Brecht taught rightly, is made up of a series of well-polished exaggerations. Only these artefacts of monstrous unreality can coincide realistically with the monstrosity of capitalist accumulation.

Miles away I hit the petrol bubble again. There is a most poignant cinema film by Gaudart, who had reason to hate television like the end of the world. A working youngster steals off time, records and devotion from his gramophone company to date with a young Parisian living behind a window on the other side of his street. Once he gets into her flat, he is introduced nicely to her parents. Still exchanging niceties with these parents, their daughter has already let in her student lover, a boy abundant in free time and spare money for fashion clothes. “Well”, the girl announces, “we two are off. Have a nice evening!” Her working-class guest is left standing uneasily among her parents. Her parents look uneasily at this one, not ordered, not taken. “Well” says her mother defeatistically, “You can watch television with us.” And she shows him to a place in front of the screen. He could not even turn down the offer.

So I sat down and looked at the screen. I could not really make out how long I had been off-line but for Central European standards it was by far too long. Once in Germany, I saw a business card of a former freak which had a postal address, telephone, even fax and said in the end “no mail”. Everyone has a good laugh at his joke. Clearly, he will reach retirement age very soon. However, “no mail” was the message I got from the screen as soon as I managed to remember my damned pass-word. What is this, I marvelled. There are dozens of comrades getting paid for the hour, sitting in front of computer screens and being obliged to simulate some kind of work. Is it possible that none of them has been able to direct his or her professional boredom at me for some minutes all these days? To be sure, there were several hundred spam messages. A lot of exceptions prove a rule. And at that point, my anger was content to find a single culprit, the woman whom our comrades on the Ural railways would have surely called my girl-friend. Clearly, she had all her mind taken by the task to date with a German student in the Carpathian Mountains. To do that, they would have certainly exchanged a hell of a lot of Emails these last weeks. And there had been not a single half minute of mercy to throw some rests of dry bread at me which had eventually fallen from the orgiastic meal they were preparing each other. Actually, I did not resent her not writing to me. But I did resent myself to have believed in so many cheap declarations she had issued for my relief. “Yes, next time I sleep with another one, I will tell you, even beforehand. Imagine, I will write to you what I feel and how I develop.” We had been so merry then. I declared in return to write old-style paper letters and send them to an address which she should let me know. She did not let me

know any address. So this was it? As far as mail is concerned, this was it. But there is still another way to reach friends born after 1975. It's costly, but it sometimes works: mobile telephones. Throwing half a thousand roubles in, I got a cabin in Sverdlovsk.

-“Hello, I am in Asia.”

-“Where?”

-“In Asia!”

-“Where?”

-“In A-S-I-A!!! Sverdlovsk, tomorrow Omsk.”

-“Where? I don't understand a word.”

When you have not spoken to a real friend for weeks such conversation is not exactly funny. I remained silent this time. Then there came a question from the other continent:

-“Have you seen lake Bajkal?” Lake Bajkal was farther away from me than she at that moment. Lake Bajkal meant more than half a week of non-stop train ride, anyway I would never get a cheap ticket so quickly now in the high season, in the middle of August. I looked at the cold rain beating against the windows. How can you explain anything about Siberia when the telephone connection transmits but syllables? I know, future generations will adopt. Their communication will be more general, less self-commiserating probably:

-“(.”

-“).”

-“+”

-“o.k.”

However, I managed to ask and make myself understood.

-“Will you go on holiday with your new lover?”

-“Yes, 16th.”

Again she had broken her promise. Another time, it was my questions to hit on it. She would never tell me out of her own initiative. And in the meantime she would enjoy

the sociable peace until the evil investigative fervour of my questions would destroy our harmony again. I thought about English classes back in 1988. We had a very nice teacher. She was never envious of our time and attention when we told her outright that we had found no time or motivation to prepare her texts, i.e. in classical terms to do our home-work. "But," she once explained desolately "I don't want to hit on it, you know. I want to hear it from you, right away, just when we start talking about our texts. You can probably imagine that I have little professional satisfaction in discussing a text with you which nobody except for me has taken the trouble to read. This is not a theatre course, I want to teach you English." Yes, we did understand her, we did commiserate her. But surely, next time we would have a go again and try to get through without admitting that we had not cared a minute about her, that is, between classes. During classes I even fell in love with her which was the source of much confusion and irritably hot day-dreams. Nonetheless, it was just too elegant a feeling to cheat away without having done any home-work. In principle, I understood my friend on the other end of the telephone connection. I might have possibly done something similar. Would I? I cannot really tell. I never had the occasion to find out in the last 2 years. And in the 16 years before that, I cannot remember a single incident when I acted like that. Maybe my memory has omitted such incidents. Well, it has, now I recall. But that is very, very far away already. There was a change in the altitude of cracks and noise in the telephone line. She had given me her daughter, our daughter, as we had agreed to call her, meaning not a new bourgeois entity of two parents, pretending for heterosexual wholeness, but a whole commune (though, still to be founded). Our daughter knew perfectly how to use the poor technical base linking us. For

half a minute she simply said my name and I said hers. I said “Eva, Eva, Eva”, there was no place for lengthy talk such as “Maria Andreevna” or something of the like, simultaneously I heard “Ma-in-M-nnn-in-M-Mat---n.” My heart exploded with happiness. There is a longstanding observation in me how much I love her mother for her craziness to have a child in these times. I do not love her for having chosen a fascist father. I do not really like her compromises with Ukrainian nationalist at all.

And then, again I chanced to hear half a sentence without major interruption. It was her again. She went “I wish that the sun should shine for you.” This was too much. This was taken one to one from a pop song. I was furious with rage and anger, I was sobbing with malcontentment and bare physical disappointment. Well, the conversation was over anyway.

I got onto a commuter train. Sometimes in my life, I really wonder how I do that, getting on a train. It seems to work really independently of me, in spite of the state I am in. Getting on a train is so terribly difficult. Where do I take all this energy from, this coordination work? My friend V. told me about a case of Western workaholics. “How can you call off this advertisement campaign, when I have given my last guts, the kernel of my days to make it happen, how can you!” The complaining party was a copy-writer who had invested more or less three words into the campaign. They went like “buy our ...” or the like. I sat down in the Elektrichka train and I perfectly understood the exasperation of the colleague. He had given so much. I had given so much. For half a year, I have boiled down literally everything in my life to be able to attend to Eva. Attend to her in perfect symmetry of what her mother did for her the 2 years before. You can call it compensatory symmetry or affirmative action. I have endured her cruel scenes of envie

for months, taught her to draw calmly, taught her not to be afraid that I will kill her as her biological father kept on inscribing into her psyche. In a joint effort, we erased her fixation on Ma-ma. Whenever she cried the syllable Ma, I would run and be at her disposal. So she took to calling me ma and her mother by her first name. Sometimes, we organised an equality of attention over the week. But in the end, it was always me who took more responsibility, save for dealing with Ukrainian institutions which are a nightmare of disdain to every stranger not being able to put on the obligatory middle class Ukrainian artificial talk. Finally, I hitch-hiked with her across the Crimean peninsula while her mother was busy in Moscow. We formed a team of unbeatable liberty. Hitch-hiking together, she took the liberty to sleep on my violin case while I was fiddling in the early summer sun waiting especially for lorries with high seats and wide views to take us up, one of our shared favourites. I painted, she painted. She sang, I sang. When we went short of food, she readily learnt how to find herbs in the woods which make a nice salad. She cooperated with me whenever one of the Russian machos tried to interest the police in us. Some of these anabolica-stuffed new-Russian men apparently see no other reason for male beings to care about children than outright paedophile interests. Her biological father even tried to exploit a deliberately invented accusation of this type before a Ukrainian court against me. Though always bragging of his clientele liaisons among the Kiev ruling class he fatally lost that law case and Eva was handed over to her mother by court decision.

To tell the whole story, there was a one-sided interest by Eva for me. I was a missing species in her daily expanding collection of anthropological knowledge. She has no

brother and her biological father is a hampered, a sensually broken authoritarian Casanova. I can understand that Eva does not take the same interest in his body as her mother did. We managed to invent a more adequate language about hunger, about danger, about sleep. Sleeping is a terribly dangerous hunger for a 2 and a half year old child. We visited communes of the past and of the present. We watched sunsets and sheep, horses and kitten, pine-trees and insects, boats and locomotives. On our last day, we hit the sea at Alupta, the only place of heaven on earth I chance to know. Yet, summer and its tourists easily turn this paradise into hell. There is no peace, no single hour of night and day. It is all noise, brutal noise about making money, making photos, making souvenirs and fast transport. Well, we nicked in and out without having to spend the night there. I explained to Eva, that this is the last day, that she will be able to see her best friend Karina and that is it, that we have two night trains ahead to return her to her dad. She understood everything. She even understood the choice I gave her to bath her either in sweet or in sea water. She chose sweet water. She cried but that was out of custom. As soon as she had grasped the big, big towel, she was whole again. Silently, we walked up the hill. And there at the bend allowing to look down for the last time. To look down the cliffs to the immensely transparent blue waters, she called me to stand still and look back. "Some time" she said clearly and gazed at the waters. And she took her time. And I took my time. And we stood and looked back onto the waters. I saw bodies swimming, they were all transparent, the sun was playing around them on a deep, deep blue fond. I thought about that New Zealand writer, her hopeless love on the Spanish Isles, the words she found for her body, she had found in such waters. They might take Eva one day, I thought with a muffled

horror. One of these Ukrainian profiteers of social decay could make it with the help of some cheap adoration, some fast-food of Hollywood sentimentality and it will all go down the drain as it went with her mum: courting, binding, motherhood, emotional desertion combined with legal and material bondage. Already today Eva boasts how proud she is to be a Ukrainian; she wants to be a princess. Oh goodness, it will all be ready to ruin her life once she is old enough to buy their lies. You try to counter-educate and it is just a queer drop in a flood of false plastic dolls making her one of them. My tears were becoming a nuisance. My shirt was getting wet. "Enough" Eva said and we turned away swiftly, never looking back any more. I cannot help crying when I think about this afternoon. It is not exactly a sad memory. It was a beautiful day for us. That is all, actually. Eva can find a lot of people who can give her something similar to what I was able to give her. No construction, no Bourgeois family morale necessary. Nice, that we both are still alive. It could be worse.

Yet, even now in the listless commuter train rolling roughly into the depths of Asia, there were tears rolling down my cheek. In front of me sat a girl of 13 with her grandmother. They came from their plot of land with bags full fruits and vegetables to be conserved for a long, long winter to come. The girl did not cease to look at me. Her observation was all-intense. Suddenly, after silent conversation with her grandmother, she opened her bag and took out a big glass bowl of raspberries. "This is for you" she said simply. You know, what she could not know. The last days, I had missed a lot, but to be honest not exactly raspberries. Yet, I never ate so sweet, so aromatic raspberries as in that train. All the *plavčiki* sitting around this scene were cheering and the girl got a bit shy in the noise. She felt cornered, really.

Nobody should have any reason to claim that she had taken a fancy in me. So she did, what only very poor people are able to do. She dealt out all her harvest of raspberries. I bet there was nothing left for her in the end. She would give it to everyone around her, the fruit of hours and hours of work. On getting off the train, I secretly promised her that my love will try to learn from hers, so much more mature than mine, so very, very useful for everyone around.

5. Omsk sisters on holiday

The afternoon's sky is run over with clouds. To their company, the main gardens of Omsk inner city are overrun with people in festive spirits. Gulane, walking, is a strange cardinal aim in Russian life. It has the air of a dinosaur habit, a hang-over from baroque times. It involves showing off as much as finding a collective melody of strolling and, well, and meeting. Maybe that is the main attraction, you constantly meet and greet on these walks. So gulanie is basically a provincial past-time. Once you know less than a crucial one per cent of the people you chance to look into their eyes, the thrill has gone. A modern metropolis allows no gulanie. Maybe that is why folks in Moskow are so terribly fixed to narrow consumerist ghettos or, if they cannot afford it, terribly privatist.

Omsk is a provincial setting, to be sure. Looking at the seemingly chaotic mass movement through the main alleys of the park and adjacent places, they recognise at least some friends every fifty steps. I would attribute the atmosphere of gayness to the short and precious summer days, had I not made my first acquaintance with Russian public walking in knee-deep snow of mid winter. I was

working in the town of Khar'kov then and lived at the place of two young women at one of the two central promenades. Their mother was at a psychiatric hospital then and I was very careful, not to abuse the trust they had put in me, opening their door to a stranger. While the elder one was being sucked up by a business career, selling English style tea to customers not necessarily dissatisfied with Russian style tea, the younger sister was a public walker, a passionate one to say the least. My proposal to have a look at Chechov in a theatre next door were really misconceived from the beginning. One was busily working. The other busily walking, gulala. Several times in the evening she would sort of dive up from the street to the upper story flat. I could then observe the movements of her strong, large and young body. She was as if radiating from the glamour of the street, the encounters, the little consumerist distractions on her ways. In her self-assured demeanour was something common with this sly selfish Russian obsession of some women about themselves only, their own bodies only, their own smiles only. Essentially, Zinaida Evgenina Serebrjakova hardly painted anybody else than herself from 1884 to 1967. Sure she was French-born, but ten years of life in Petrograd (1912-1918 and 1920-1924) and on her husband's estate, Neskuchnoe (1918-1919), made a perfect Russian flaneuse of her. My flatmate's eyes were glowing quite akin each evening in the light of the promenade lamps; her breath had the strength and determination with which you have to take eastern frosts in order to receive them as a welcome medium to invigorate your senses. One prolonged hesitation, one defeatist minute of aimless standing around and you have lost the game, you would be bloody freezing for the rest of the evening. She had no air of freezing. I probably never understood a person by mere sight in such a spatial

wholeness. And here it was. She did not need any artificial scene. Har'kov main street was her inborn theatre and she came in from the Estrada just to nip some warmer air as if not paying any attention on the applause following her steps behind the curtain. And back again she would dive onto the street like a Bahamian diver out for red shells in the depth of tropical water.

Four years later, I became suddenly curious, what had become of them. My imagination was indeed insufficient to portrait the younger sister now. Even larger, stronger, with a still more spatial presence of her body than half a decade before? Something must have changed, changed direction probably. I decided to take a look by surprise. I actually managed to sneak into the main entrance, got up the stairs and knocked at their door. An elderly, utterly frightened woman responded. I knew that their mother had returned, who would probably never open the door for me. And if she opened, it would probably all be representation, niceties, conversation actually dispersing the attention needed to grasp the traces of a very specific atmosphere, I once succeeded to understand with such a rare sensual intensity. Probably it was only possible then due to the privileged senses sharpened to the utmost by a first sight. I talked reassuringly through the closed door. She would indeed not open. I left, silently laughing about myself. Actually many Har'kov friendships ended similarly. I tended to be somehow too close to the home bases to associate freely. Indeed, I should have better taken part in the public walking. But for such past-time I definitely lack this minimum one per cent of acquaintances in these cities.

So, Har'kov and Omsk are sisters with little in between them than the Ural and some 3000 railway kilometres:

Russian provincial towns, run away from them if you want and if only can.

The beauty in an acquaintance of non-erotic closeness counts nothing under the grinding set of stereotypes processing the intestines of provincial sociability for a materially beneficial outcome in the most traditional sense. For my little travelling ignorance this does not make much sense.

Leaving the town for Novosibirsk, I stood in front of the railway office with two sisters. For some time, they followed every movement of me with strangely attentive eyes and then said with occasional intimacy: “German”. I was scattered. It is quite irritating to be somehow publicly identifiable as a legitimate grand-son to mass murderers. Intrusive observation is so much more reassuring when you know it to be one-sided. “Will Novosibirsk be as provincial as Omsk?” I asked them, plunged in shame and guilt. “Omsk is provincial” one sister answered slyly. “Novosibirsk is the capital,” the other one concluded. They remarked that I was still red in my face from their investigative assault.

6. taking an expectable nip of aloofness at Akademgorodok

I got stuck in the left luggage cellar of Novosibirsk station. Not with my luggage, but with two young Englishmen. They would talk about the tail of the devil and his children. They had been travelling like me with not more than 10 words of Russian at their disposal to dilute their

observations with any local opinion around. Actually, it was quite interesting to listen to their accumulated accounts. They had as many questions as they had collected mute-film observations. All they said was really nicely balanced. I hope I will not make worse in China.

-“Did we get it right, economically everything is going to pieces here, isn’t it?”

Well, what should I say? After a little while, I could figure out two contradicting political approaches in the two travellers.

One of them was pushing a nice anti-neoliberal line of observation, the other one was more sceptical.

-“What do Russians really think about all this Coca-Cola invasion?”

Well, what should I say?

-“We have been to the countryside, there is absolutely nothing left?”

Well, what should I say?

-“We look at this Novosibirsk railway front, these incredibly big buildings in such a ruined state and we tend to think, this is the work of socialism altogether. But that is not right, is it, socialism did the work, capitalism ruined them?”

Well, what should I say?

Here were two guiding stars, heirs to their Australian counterparts. I liked to listen to them more than answering them. For what should I say? They were from Southampton.

I have been to Southampton only once at the end of a crazy hitch-hike by road and boat from Cuba to the Bahamas, from Florida to Newburyport into the most appalling New English conservatism, taking a boat to Southampton, where it all came from, the pilgrims, the

sects, Puritanism, the workaholics, the British colonial drill. America would be a continental, cool and slightly ruined out-back like Siberia had there not been the iron grip from Southampton. Well, the Southampton you see now is a corpse of what it was. A corpse stuffed with money, though. I have rarely seen a posher place. There were closed residential regatta quarters, recent development sites which stank of money and private security and boredom. Every step you made was a commercial event and a security issue simultaneously. Setting over to the Isle of Man is an occasion to rip you of incredible sums money. You can cross half of Siberia for the price you pay for a ridiculous little boat trip at home. I walked through the black night in your place for hours, still sea sick and already sick of Europe. Around the homes of the very rich stands an immeasurable army of semi-detached middle class lodgings. Everything so British, so cared for, so pale, so sick of tea and sugar and Sunday papers and their night shopping of cheap booze served by another army of Pakistani neo-colonial commercial servants. And all the mainstream gives them in return for their 24-hour servitude is disrespect and some pennies. And if the racially white mainstream does not succeed in keeping up appearances, most middle-class in England does though, a pathetically shaven pit-bull racism emerges. Your predecessors were able to tyrannise half of the globe with it. The hell of neo-liberal globalisation essentially is of British colonial making (thank Soviet Russia that it is not of German making). And Southampton ripped its fruits for 300 years. Southampton was the door spitting out pale, hampered, raping, rubbing, murdering soldiers onto the colonised world and sucking in merchants for incredibly unfair prices. Now it is a nice little back-yard of London-Heathrow continuing the business on a much larger and still more brutal scale.

What should I say? You are travelling a country which ripped itself off the chain of colonial profiteers before the Irish could even set up a nationalist army. Soviet Russia has resisted the global game of capitalist trade hierarchy and it has paid the highest price in world history for it. Soviet Russia has financed the decolonisation of British crimes, your predecessors left around the world: Shanghai, Burma, Tanzania, Namibia, Granada, and still helped to reconstruct your one's rubbles better than yours had ever allowed them to become. And with a careful I for today's German neo-fascists who operate breathtakingly close to our argument, we could add to the list Magdeburg, Dresden, Halberstadt. Your army only set fire on them and the Nazis remained. Soviet Russia liberated them street by street and then built them up more spaciously, more rational and more social than they had ever been before. Siberia had to bleed bitterly for the combined ignorance of our grand-fathers.

During almost a century Soviet Russia and its Siberian backwaters have challenged the deadly world order, they have succeeded in turning the Capitalist war propaganda upside down. And now, after 70 years of incredible efforts and exhaustion, they have given in, politically dwarfed, culturally annihilated and economically reduced to a colony themselves. Can you blame them, while Hodorkovskij daily transfers fortunes to the London municipality?(note 2012: in the following, Mihail Borisovič had to cease some of these privileges to capital closer aligned with the federal political police) Often Siberians themselves assess that their country looks as if after a war. Well, Siberia has lost the most important war in modern history just recently: the Cold War. And now it pays for a cold peace under foreign and domestically foreign class rule. What should I say?

I only had a night for Southampton. But it shocked me probably more than Siberia was able to shock you all that way. Your officially public spaces were a moneyed emptiness with privatised access for privileged consumers only. Your licked buildings of pretentiously modest height are actually a source of financial ruin, administered by dubious mortgage trusts and predator banks sucking the blood out of middle-class careerists, such as you might become one day if everything goes as they want it to go. What should I say?

Let's spit in their soup even if invited to their dining table, let's smuggle sand into most varied parts of their machine, let's strike where we can to bring those down who ruined Siberia, and Southampton. I did not say that in front of the Novosibirsk railway station, though. I thought it would look just too ridiculous, to spit out so much anger and uncouth class hatred on such a nice metropolitan morning.

After eating a set of most juicy cœur-de-beuf tomatoes from private gardens off the street floor, I was all ready for painting a juicy portrait of a 19th century Siberian house left over in the middle of the city. Then, I made my way to the academic township south at the "Ob seaside". Learning a lesson from my break-down in the social isolation of the Ural Mountains, I had taken great pains to hold on to three contacts in the centre of Siberia: Kostja, Olga and Larissa. The first is one of Katja's friends, the second her one and only mother and the third among her best comrades. So, for the following two weeks, my movements and investigations were contained within the far reaching provisions made by my Leningrad companion of mid-July before departing to Rwanda, wise provisions, to be sure.

Trying to sketch the tune of Akademgorodok, I would be caught in the trap of singing a song for Katja. That would be unfair to Akademgorodok and I prefer to serve for the cult of personalities who will be physically less than 10 000 km away from me during the forthcoming year(“:. All I can say is that I am glad for her, that she got out of this. Everybody who wants to do something in the sense of Marx’s 11th thesis on Feuerbach has to get out of a Khrushchovian dream nowadays (“Die PhilosophInnen haben die Welt nur verschieden interpretiert. Es kommt darauf an, sie zu veraendern”¹).

After two weeks in their orbit, I can even understand her leaving the circles of Novosiberian vanguard art and its cute little Bohemia. One night, I got up in Kostja’s studio and discovered the poster of an anti-commercialist “monstration”. It has enchanted my soul, as the cruel French song goes, and stolen my sleep (“et la première qu’il vu, lui a ravis son âme”²). To be honest, I knew about the anti-commercialist happenings in Novosibirsk long before from Russian indymedia. And to my mind it lacks some originality to post-modernise Mayday with the financial help of the Ford foundation. Yes, I know, the Ford foundation was used by the scene to finance the production of their more commercialist interfaces. Nevertheless, the whole of this little fragmented collective has an eye on the

¹ The philosophers have just interpreted the world in different modes, whereas the real issue is to change it. (that is not the official translation)

² „And the first one he saw has enchanted his soul.” from the ancient French song “Le roi a fait battre tambour”.

institutions of Austro-German and US-American agencies for cultural imperialism. A considerable part of its productivity is directly linked to a speculation bubble on the agencies' objective need to let off balloons with hot air from the centre of Siberia. Such artefacts rising from the soil of Novosibirsk are worth a smile among monitors located in the world centres of capital and cultural accumulation. And their smile can be worth more purchase power on the world market than the life-toil of thousands in these damned forgotten freezing plains.

If the same town bore let's say the name Starosibirsk or Novokuzneck, its cultural marketing assets would be much more limited. I am not against using culturally motivated dole money from the enemy. D'accord. Nimm was Du kriegst. Aber pfeiff auf den Quark. Denk an Deine Klasse. Und die mach' stark.³

But can you really provide long standing anti-commercialist agitation with the theoretical background of Mickey Mouse? Guy Debord was a provocateur and the Situationist International of 1968 did produce comics, yes. But the comrades knew Marx's analysis of value by heart and developed it further. That does make a difference.

However, the poster I saw is miles ahead of Mickey Mouse already, highly economic in its communication: condensed, tactile hatred. There is an irrefutable urge in it. I will go around the corner to have its integral text before me:

³ Erich Kaestner "Take what you can get hold of. But refuse to buy their lies. Think about your class and make it strong (i.e. the working-class, as the song makes quite clear, there is a thrilling music by Eisler for it)

“WHEN they tell us, that our love goes along with youth
discount,
WHEN they sell our liberty in new-year’s price-breaker
action,
WHEN the prison guard wants to snicker (us) into his
format
WHAT can we do to retort against such a Demonstration
of force and power (the question mark gets lost in the
flying hair of a flabbergasted McDonald’s clown with his
eyes crossed out by black spray paint)
MONSTRATION, come and monstrate, all that is not yet
sold out on the total market of everything

fucking police!!!

www.monstration.narod.ru

The first sentence is the strongest one. Though there is an essentialism in the fixation of “our love” it is still a convincingly open signifier for a tissue of unsalable/uncontrollable dynamics in social relations. The point is made by the collectivisation of a collectivising tendency. I am grateful to the collective copy writer (: for not putting in “my love” or “your love”. The whole loving business is terribly individualising and reactionary as we know. But in the slogan “our love”, there is at least still a, let’s say theoretical, possibility to form a critical mass. Yet, behind the polemical construction might hide an all too clear notion of the lovingly unalienated life without commercialism. I would place its approach closer to the Marxian philosophical-economical manuscripts, than to the brilliant introduction (written in 1843 for the critique of the Hegelian philosophy of Law). According to a recent Polish discussion I was lucky to attend, this last piece is by far the most brilliant Marxian writing among the younger texts.

The Polish comrades judged from the viewpoint of their political practice (check on www.lewica.pl, I cite the contribution to our discussion by the editor of the book reviews) which makes their lively perception of the text practically valuable. Look how that sounds in Russian (by the way: is the time ripe for a new translation or does the old one set of sparks and lightening similarly bright as from reading and rereading the German original?):

“Единственно *практически* возможное освобождение России есть освобождение с позиций *той* теории, которая облавляет высшей сущностью человека самого человека. В России Эманципация от *средневековья* возможна лишь как Эманципация вместе с тем и от *частных* побед над средневеком. В России *никакое* рабство не может быть уничтожено без того, чтобы не было уничтожено *всякое* рабство. *Основательная* Россия не может совершить революцию, не начав революцию *с самого основания*. Эманципация Русского есть Эманципация *человека*. Голова этой Эманципации – *искусства*, ее сердце – *пролетариат*. Искусства не может быти воплощена в действительность без упражнения пролетариата, пролетариат не может упражнить себя не воплотив Искусства в действительность.” (введение К критике гегелевской философии права, 1834, Карл Маркс, сочинения, изд. 2., 1955, 414-429, тут 428 и 429.)

What makes this dialectical firework to my mind materially powerful today is its openness (pay attention to the 6 more or less delicate manipulations, I fabricated in copying the original text, to make rereading more interesting). In contrast to the later philosophical-economical manuscripts there is no essentialist version of the unalienated man created and superimposed to revolutionary creativity. Marx did a step backwards in this respect, as Europe did in a whole. Most of bourgeois humanism follows down the

idealist line, including major parts of the Social Forum process.

The second sentence in the poster breaks free from essentialist sentimentality, but at what a price? “Our freedom” stinks of US freedom-fries. Freedom has been a word meaning positively nothing throughout bourgeois enlightenment, today with enlightenment under authoritarian reversion it means “regime change in failed states”. But the rebel phrase against its sell-out still makes sense. And maybe it is better to promise positively nothing than to promise false love, isn’t it?

As to the third catch-phrase I am not sure whether I have understood it right. “Snickers” sounds like a chocolate bar brand. “Format” sounds like a torture instrument from the hellish cabinet of Mister Gill Gates. “Prison ward” sounds no better. Interestingly, the third movement has no positive vision any more. It is a distopia without a hole in it. My friend Merle from Munich would say: “the mouse cannot get out”.

The call for action has a very consistent grammatical form. The noun monstration is dissolved into a verb, monstrate, very clever. To my mind, the activating quality of a text can be measured to a certain extent by the proportion of verbs in active use.

“Total market” makes my bones chill, because a terrible cry of 1943 from the Sportpalast in Berlin resounds in my spine reading this (“Wollt Ihr den totalen Krieg?” “Ja!”). I would never use it. But as the grand-children of those who put an end to that totality at least, you are free to use the legacy as you think it right.

For the same reason, I avoid the catch-phrase “totalitarianism”. As far as I could follow the discussion, it is not an analytical category, but a short cut to the above mentioned spinal reaction. Hannah Arendt abused it to sell her misconception of Soviet Russia and the French Revolution alike (to the difference of Soviet Union propaganda she earned her reputation lying both about American capitalism and about Socialism, whereas Brezhnev only lied about Socialism). General Marcos and a lot of Communist Cuban and Latin American writers use a similar shortcut to make up for an insufficient analysis of global capitalism and its intrinsic contradictions today. The problem about shortcuts to spinal reactions is that our spine is damned sly. Overuse its rapid reaction just a little too much and there will be no reaction at all. But, listen comrades. We need a last resort. If Bush, like El’cin starts to shell his own parliament (the October 2001 anthrax attacks by parts of the FBI were already very close to that what might come). If this happens tomorrow, we will still need a word to describe what is happening. We cannot give out all analytical registers before the very end. Well, this warning actually stems from an experience about the use of Prussian blue in painting. Maybe however, this metaphor is not adequate and philosophical analytics entitle to use totalising connotations here and now. But still, I would like to be able to understand a philosophical foundation of the terms in use then.

That way or the other, “Total market of everything” is a pleonasm and not helpful. Sounds as if you do not really believe the totality you state in the first place. Quite obviously, there is an intrinsic contradiction in this final call. If the market is total, those who will come to the demonstration can only be market zombies. Guy Debord

would agree with this vision. Althusser would excuse your insult on the demonstrators, because you cannot fight the ruling ideology without being ideological yourself, a dilemma which should not lead to self-contentment, though. If the market is not total we can still call our enemy a hegemonic force, even a dominating (господствующая) force.

But how do you call our enemy? “Fucking police” This is unacceptable. If they would be actually fucking, let’s say one another, everything would be easier with them. They would not seek so actively for sublimation with their beating sticks, they would be less keen on grabbing for substitutive objects on the streets and demobilise them in arrest cells for symbolic penetration. The main problem about police is that they are rather not fucking but doing their service for getting satisfaction.

Still, there is a special problematic with gay policemen, according to my colleagues in the Scottish police arrest following our G8 protests 2005. They had definitely a longer criminal record than me as far as the British Isles were concerned and they could illustrate their claims with vivid detail. According to them, Thatcherism and Blairism combined have tended to transform British police units from (alienated) working-class background recruitment towards co-opting lower middle-class careerists. I cannot tell what was the case before the miner strike repressions 1984, when the bobby was still a workmate and repression on the mainland rather an economic task for private capital. Now, there are definitely major gay clientele networks making up very aggressive police units, which operate in working-class districts of Glasgow. Their sadist potential is evident. I have seen some evidence for sexualised

aggression during my arrest in Glasgow. Now these policemen might actually be fucking during service, but still this rather reinforces hierarchy within the unit and hierarchy creates aggressive practices towards civil victims. This is a delicate topic, something for a diary, really, not for a poster. In our press campaign which got a good echo in Scottish mainstream media (just google for “free fresco academy” and “G8”) we choose to avoid the issue altogether. I think this issue cannot be adequately communicated in a society which is still repressively heterosexualised. It is just too attractive for agents of law and order who adhere to a heterosexual credo. They would never go along with us and criticise police violence as an expression of capitalist domination. They would only take up our evidence to campaign for heterosexually clean police beating. I could not imagine anything more horrible than that.

Maybe the slogan “fucking police” is just an error and should sound “fuck the police”. I could go along with that, if the verb would be free of aggressive connotation. The dynamics of revolutionary aggression are only then trustworthy when they build up independently from individual sexual economies. I would not go along with an untrustworthy build-up of revolutionary violence. Let this be the business of the SWP UK leaflet sellers, who hailed the bulldozers in Belgrade as the early agents of proletarian rule when in fact their drivers were just paid hooligans as in Georgia completing the work of NATO bombing towards regime change. “Proletkult” was an artist collective searching for a way to communist society, not a positivist religion hailing repressive relations, e.g. of sexualised violence, sociologically present in the Soviet working-class of its time.

So, sexualising revolutionary violence is unacceptable an operation. The most progressive empirical approach which comes to my mind where the teachings of some political commissars in the Interbrigadas fighting for the Spanish Republic. According “the esthetics of resistance” by Peter Weiss (1970s, written in German, available in Spanish translation since last year) a Swedish commissar gave lessons on how to masturbate with pleasure and without harming your body for male and female volunteers at work in the Spanish Civil War. The official aim of these courses was to eliminate the phenomena of prostitution behind the Republican lines, which was clearly identified as contradictory to communist principles.

Consequently, there is no political point in promoting sexualised violence or violent sex. “Fuck the police” would then quite astonishingly be rather Christian a slogan, like “Love your enemy” or “Make love to those who beat you”. This sounds more a conservative wife’s recipe for keeping her family together. Actually, this is definitely abhorrent and not really a slogan fit for a monstrating with it through Novosibirsk.

There is a problem about the use of English in the circles of Siberian artist vanguard in general. I have read about half a hundred posters, postcards and flyers of their making. They all try their luck at English. The economic motivations behind this are perfectly legitimate and understandable. However, to be honest, I did not come across a single English expression which was both grammatically and logically acceptable. Well there are nice misunderstandings and hilarious russicisms, such as calling a festival for contemporary cinema “festival for actual

kino". But when it comes to English prosaic texts by the Novosibirsk vanguard, my sense of humour feels somehow acutely over-exploited. Well, judging by some years of socialisation I am a German, as the two sisters at Omsk railway station legitimately insulted me (sorry folks, this is a complicated one again: less than half: 8 (if you do not count bourgeois holidays 17) of 35 full years, i.e. 1971-1995 with the exceptions 1977/1978 Italy, 1986/1987 Australia, 1990/1991 France, 1994 Rumania). Consequently, my sense of humour should rather not become the guideline to set a local guillotine into operation. The trouble is rather that Russian copy-writers do not really seem to have a clue about the degree of dilettantism in their publications. How much is it to send an Email to an English native speaker and counter-check before printing a junk message several 1000 times and sending it out to an applauding global audience? I can tell you, it is almost free. I go through this unpleasant step towards publishing whenever there is any English, Italian, Spanish, French, Polish or Russian word to come out of the printing machine I feel responsible for. The problem is not training or resources. The problem is that artist vanguard reproduces as a farce what happens in society as a tragedy. Half-educated middle-class machos have the controlling positions over cultural production and they have no sense of co-operating for reaching better quality. Major parts of their publicly exhibited creationism is unsocial, phallic in a Lacanian sense, that means in practice: boring.

8. affluent gardens at the sources of river Ob

So I stood in front of the railway station of Bijsk, the home town of Larissa on the last bit of railway tracks towards the Altaj (Altai) Mountains. Their Massive hosts the Russian

border to China west of Mongolia. I waited for her to pick me up. In the meantime, I resolved to play the clarinet for money. It was for the first in my life. Both the trumpet and my new (in fact a 100 year old) violin had suffered demission at a final luggage check in Lena's Moscow flat. I was very excited playing for Roubles and thought my breath would faint any moment. It quivered, to be sure. But necessarily, you have to go through fits of uneasiness to learn to hold the tension of the air in any situation. There is no way around failure if there is to be failure for the beginning. You have to begin.

I got loads of money. The poorer people live, the more they are liable to give in to sugared tea and music. I rather played unsugared cacao, i.e. Brecht-Eisler songs which nobody would know. They all know only Brecht-Weil songs, because on the opposite side of the globe, Hollywood made such a marketing decision in the 1940s and not another, basta.

People would throw in either very small amounts down to single kopejki or generous donations of paper money. One ambulant newspaper seller threw in paper and wanted a chat. What should I do, I was grateful for his donation, he must have sold a lot of newspapers to earn such a sum. I was also grateful for the pause he decided against the urge of my pseudo-professional ambition.

-“Where do you come from?”

-“Baltic Sea.” We had this one already

-“Ah, Riga.” He was a bright one. Before falling in the hands of a Latvian chauvinist minority, Riga was indeed a magnet for all-Soviet bohemia. I even met a Russian wall-painting “monumentalist” artist in Odessa in 1999, who had made a relief in memory of Jurij Gagarin in the Altaj region.

He could cry his eyes out for the lost companionship of his Riga youth.

There was no beating about the bush with this one. I had to be a bit more responsible. Not wanting to speak about the personal qualities of Adolf Hitler, I nevertheless choose to silence those damned 17 years in Germany.

-“More south.” I answered with a poker spirit.

-“South, that is what? Lithuanian?”

-“Don’t you hear my Polish accent?” Damn, again, I was heading right into a lie. I do not like to lie to strangers. You never really know what comes out of it. It is much more comfortable to lie to close friends. You can tell right away how and what you risk. Well, I also feel bad with lies myself, sometimes. But that’s another story.

-“So you are a Pole?”

-“Well, I have been living in Warsaw for the last decade.”

-“I see,” he concluded, “you are Polish.” People do not seem to have a clue what a bunch of German assholes has been living in poor Warsaw in the last century. For them it is all so easy going, this 20th century, if you live there, you are Polish.

There was a silence. My friend Nicolas from Geneva had a double passport, Swiss and French. On travelling to Vietnam by rail and road in the 1990s, he learnt to keep his mouth shut about Switzerland. It is an unbecoming word for people’s imaginative resources. In the best case they get you into chocolate, generally, you will be interviewed about banks and big money. But exposing a little hint at being French, it was suddenly all cinema, fashion, Paris, chansons, savoir vivre. I seriously considered to risk the Hitler conversation, now. Why play cat and mouse? But then I had a rare glimpse of sobriety. Hold on, I said to myself,

officially this guy paid for your music only, not for your talking. Why should I say anything at all. It was getting hot.

-“You were living with your family, there?” This guy seemed to be really interested... as it appeared not only about labels and my position in the passport-based racist order in and around Europe. So, I decided to leave the defensive trenches and try to find answers which could surprise even me.

-“No, I was living there with a woman I loved very much”

-“Why did you come here then?”

-“One day she told me that she would rather like me to go away. I had been west already, so I decided to move east this time.”

-“Why would she not like you any more?”

-“It was not that. But she liked another one as well. In the first 4 months nothing needed to be changed, but then, she got a bit impatient. And her new lover was probably not a Communist either, that winter at least. I heard he even went on a bike tour allowing a third person later.”

-“So you are a Communist?”

-“I try my best. Communism seems actually a bit far w away for a single party if you ask me. Presently, I would even throw in everything for Socialism, I am not against Anarchist methods.” This was getting a monologue. The newspaper sellers wanted facts and not a revision of the split of the first International. So he returned to hardware.

-“Where do you go?” That was an easy one for a change.

-“Altaj, Kitaj.” He passed an absorbing smile to me and continued with a very familiar voice, like a homeless to a homeless.

-“Where do you sleep?” He had evidently not believed my destination. Altaj is expensive for travellers and Kitaj, ie. China without paying for another visa, needs a 4000 kilometre trip around Mongolia, for there is no legal border

crossing on the Altaj plateau, up to more than 4000 metres above sea level.

-“I know Larissa” I answered thoughtlessly, “she might put me up.” Now, I had definitely become more sincere than I wanted to. Thinking why, I detected a slightly inconsistent intention to make up for the lie about my Polishness. I was not really sorry for him, actually, but somehow I was sorry for my Polish friend. I know that she extremely dislikes that story. As for the name I had betrayed, in a town of a quarter of a million telling a first name would probably not amount to a breach of conspiracy rules, would it?

-“You will sleep with her?” Oh no, this gets boring, I thought as if watching a bridge collapse into water.

-“I never thought about that.” I answered and put in all my available concentration after 9 consecutive night trains from Praha Holosovice right to these doorsteps. I had no choice than to fix his sight with my glance, for evading his eyes with such an answer would have been worth no more than a giggle. It all worked perfectly well. This was the first lie to him I did enjoy. And to counter-balance, I continued with a sincere answer which did not fail to astonish myself, “I am more interested in what she wants.” That was a good formula to cut his sexist talk short. And indeed, the conversation was over. My proletarian sponsor returned to his work, which I sincerely respected, not only for filling my purse.

Taking up the clarinet play, I thought about reacting to all obsessive talking by nice people in this manner, with a mix of Tolstoj compassion and Babel short-hand. If a sympathetic anti-communist would again try to pump me up with “Hitler same as Stalin” small-talk, as my elderly acquaintances at Akademgorodok the day before, I would try to speak about the American administration today and

our prospects for the future. I marvelled at prefabricated sentences like “I am not so much interested in what you call Communism, but I am very curious which work you do like most on a building site.”

Anybody who has seriously worked for agitation knows that this is just as good a preparation as playing chess with three, continually changing sides. In a lively conversation, you would never literally retreat a horse or use a prefabricated sentence, but the element of movement and surprise, abstracting from the middle-class obsession to win a discussion personally can be trained indeed. Brecht would even make a fool of himself on stage just to let the audience have it all, including social truth in its most agreeable, materialist and dialectical elasticity.

A train station official turned up and explained that any begging was severely forbidden around her train station. She did so in a loud voice. And then she continued in a low voice, that I should just bother to put away the money already earned. This is Russia how I like it. The sun was shining and there she came, Larissa.

In the twilight of the evening, we were on the allotment of her parents. A whole valley of allotments was boasting and fertile, overloaded with berries, vegetables. I had come south, finally. Everything was whole again. I felt like Eva in her big towel after a cold bath. Soviet allotments are the most rational luxury on earth. It is just barbarian how Westerners drag their summer vegetables out of supermarkets. I am not speaking about the allotment banja now, for it was not on the agenda. Generally, I found out that Larissa had just as much puritanical drill as necessary to become very good friends. None of that malicious over-production your senses get insulted with in genuinely

puritanical countries like the Check Republic, England, or, beware, the Berlin alternative ghetto. We went home in dusk already, loaded with our harvest. There were little apples with humoresque red and yellow paintings, tomatoes which could be called lion hearts, but oxen hearts was all right as well and, of course, there were raspberries, raspberries as if to console the whole block with them. For the first time this year in Russia I felt something like warm summer ease, and my sentiment registered with a new kind of calm that cold dense rain set in that evening for the rest of the week. True, there had been some hours in the outskirts of Valdaj, some seconds in the Ural mountains on getting out of the train, where the sensuality of a wholeness of summer tended to culminate, but that was still comparatively a frosty ease.

Of course, I am not talking about the climate, but about a years happiness, or questions of musical taste if you like. Maybe I thought, Katja and Larissa should be taken serious with their late-Wagnerian weakness, i.e. their lack of immunity against the movement in Rachmaninov. Did the charlatan not coax about a point in his concept of music, even when interpreting Chopin? Once you reach this point, he pretended all the consecutive steps flow like rivers down with ease. We know, that the music teacher of Hanno Buddenbrock, or was it Adrian Leverkuehne, would not admit such pilgrim's talk in an age of industry. Indeed, I get suspicious when the two are being combined. Who's working day gets distributed to whom in this transaction? If you want the non-understandable, do not accept it in the product form, mixed with heavy perfumery. Take Prokofiev, take Berg, head to the light, let the incomprehensible go through your senses at the peak of attention to the comprehensible. Face the absurdity of late

capitalism all the while trying to understand, to relate, to get clear of the mist. Death will break our hands, our senses anyway. Death will through us into a lack of clarity which will be enough for all and everything. As long as my senses allow to look straight, I will give my best to look straight, to have all our known instruments sharpened and the material ready for creating just those curves and detours which we socially need. Mist and perfume is a poor workmate on the building site. You can not even produce mist with mist and perfume with perfume. Look at the historic death of Rainer Maria Rilke. All his anesthesiations with artistic sublimation of death and decay were useless even in his own hands once it was getting materially serious for him to close his shop. He was unripe in spite of all his rituals simulating self-ripening. He even ran away from a well-meaning doctor. He had a pathetic and costly attempt at what my friend Nicolas does with the twist of a tongue: he left Geneva for Paris. Nobody wanted to hear his message in the post-war salons down there. According to rather embarrassed, friendly witnesses, he declaimed some dogmatic formulas about automatic writing and that was it. Nobody around him would believe or want to listen to such talk any more. The neo-Catholicist left the scene as mannerist as he has entered it 30 years before, a self-made-man of literary kitsch. No development, no movement, just consumption?

Well, movement in Rahmaninov (Rachmaninoff)... give me more time to find out what my friends really mean. In two years I can say more. But forgive me that in the meantime, when hitting on a Rahmaninov tune with my fiddle, I immediately start to laugh, because I find it funny now, funny and dangerous, not deep.

We made up a company of three to stroll through the rain and explore the town. Bijsk was the ending point for lazaretto trains from the battlefields of Europe, the Far East and Afghanistan. There are large complexes for military surgery. A considerable female proletariat worked in light industries, tobacco and garment. As for further details on the revolutionary history of our agreeable southern settlement at the feet of the Altaj mountains, my communist friend promised me to undo a long-standing deed, research and report on the results.

For that night, the soviet apartment of Larissa's parents was shared half. One half remained for them and a detachable second half was for us. I thought that to be a fair arrangement. And I laughed at the idea what my parents would do with their affluence of hundreds and hundreds of square metres living space. They would probably file a complaint that our luggage was occupying too much space to allow them to move. My brother and my sister would do it in written.

-“What are your plans?”

-“Well, I came to see you. I see you now. I am quite satisfied.”

-“What did you want to see?”

-“Where your faculties come from, where they leant to walk and speak so fluently. Actually, I was interested in that in the first place, even before trying to understand your life and your work in Moscow.”

-“And your plans?” I had no plans in this moment. How can you have no plans? Maybe I was just hiding them for the time being? Was I sincere not to have any eyes for them? Plans? Maybe I was right and there were no plans left as soon as the railway tracks ended which had brought me all

the way from Prague, i.e. Praha-Warszawa, Warszawa-Vilnius, Vilnius-Daugavpils, Daugavpils-Rezekne, Rezekne-Pskov, Pskov-Leningrad, Leningrad-Valdaj, Valdaj-Moscow, Moscow-Kazan, Kazan-Perm, Perm-Kyn, Kyn station-Kuzino, Kuzino-Sverdlovsk, Sverdlovsk-Omsk, Omsk-Novosibirsk, Novosibirsk-Bijsk. That was it. I had maybe some further directions prepared, but they were not so much a continuation as a set of emergency exits: to allow to run away from an eventual collision which would not do good for any party involved. Many Russians have a nice sensitivity for collisions. In their understanding, it is actually not a metaphor taken bluntly from street traffic but rather from the stage. To the contrary, an accident, that can happen to you on the street is the same as what happened to Chernobyl at three o'clock in the night of the 26th of April 1986. In Russian, that this not a collision but "avaria", something quite different, more technical, less tragic. A major fond of knowledge about collisions is actually theatre. Now, there is a little black spot in our understanding of theatre. When Visocki sang about being a prisoner of the Taganka scene in Moscow, having so utterly lost his reason "tvoj bessumny arrestant" he did not really take care to make it quite clear which theatre at the Taganka he had in mind, for there are actually two. One is the best in town, one is a nuisance altogether. Actually, Larissa does agree with me on this assessment. The problem is, that we would not be able to figure out, whether we meant the same theatre with the same verdict or whether or aims on Moscow evenings were just literally juxtaposed during all those days we lived next to each other in this megalopolis, crossed ways half a dozen times each day and would not care a penny about the other. Therefore, when I talked to Larissa in rapture about the new productions of Berthold Brecht and Peter Weiss, she would watch me with a certain

reservation. All the while, I would not spare the other house from throwing mud at. A petty-bourgeois nightmare, I called it for it had afflicted me with a seriously irritation about Čehov (Chekhov) himself, when, by fatal error, I happened to stumble into a production stifling unbearably under illustrationistic tsarist requisites and unreflected conventions.

-“Something is going wrong” she would say with a very general air.

-“Why?”

-“Your favourite theatre does not play what my favourite theatre plays and the one you do not like does not play anything my favourite theatre plays either.” I guessed that we would probably not be able to figure that out from the distance of 4000 railway kilometre. Visible, I wanted to dilute down any possible collision between us in time and space, though, the possibility of it happening one day was lingering, 1:1 you could say. We fixed each other with our eyes.

-“And your plans now?” She was right to recall me. I had to present something, to take the strain of hosting me from her for the case she did not enjoy it. She had come home after a year of work, she had gone through a concise railway week to do so. I had granted her exactly 30 hours to have a rest from Moscow finally. Before catching up and colonising her free time again. To make the trouble round, she still had to finish some work left over through the internet.

To be frank, personally, for having a rest from Moscow, I sometimes took months and it was not enough. She would be returning to Europe, to a measureless workstrain within just 20 precious days. It was not that she actually intended to lie down on the canapé. Her home flat was just to be the

base for extensive excursions. There were all the colleagues from university, 5 years back. I guess everybody of them had at some point or another damned the Siberian province and wished to be in Moscow. Maybe their moaning for something less cold, less backwaterish were not as desolate as those of the three sisters which Chechov managed to portrait from his ways to Sahalin (Sakhalin). 70 years of socialist development have changed a lot. Take the factual capital Novosibirsk, e.g. Novosibirsk did actually not exist on a map some 110 years ago. Čehov mentions a lot of water when crossing the Ob, he does not mention the hamlet Novonikolaevsk, a predecessor in a certain sense. But the 19th century Novonikolaevsk compares to Novosibirsk today like one of those a little ambitious scientific article of Lenin to the work of the Russian Revolution.

Still, Russian provincial life rotates around a certain set of axes. I already mentioned one of them, gulanie. Another one of these axes is definitely getting out. To be sure, some of Larissa's colleagues from Bijsk have made it, to Barnaul, even to Novosibirsk. But virtually nobody except for her has made it to Europe and Moscow. There are a set of questions to be answered each summer on returning and a set of friendships to be renewed, which is not so easy. You come back home after a year and you do not meet the same people any more. Same for all the relatives up in the mountains. Though, grandma has been tormenting her for the last decade to get married with as little changes as she had success. No way of bringing a Germ up there. She would just explode with good wishes for a future neither of us wanted to be that simple.

I smiled to myself when hearing about some of Larissa's relatives originating from the Altaj mountains, the very heart and centre of Asia. There is a whole poem by Anna Ahmatova (Akhmatova) just about the "eyes of Asia". Ahmatova wrote it when she was evacuated from the German blockade of Leningrad to spend the war years here, precisely among the people who had come down from the Altaj Mountains. Maybe I cheat my memory, but I imagine to have thought about these lines from the first times onwards, when I first saw her, long before I dared to intrude as much as to ask whether there was maybe still something else to be important in her life than just Moscow. Well, just Moscow, funny expression. Moscow can be understandably everything! Just by size it's more than three times the whole of the Czech republic comprising its conservative nest of cute little cosmopolitanism, Prague. -"Your plans?" she insisted. I felt cornered... and took the escape path. -"I want to hitch-hike though the Altaj mountains. Later I go to China." Well, there had been such plans indeed, but that was so far away. I was quite impressed at my casual tone, simulating that I was someone travelling with ease.

Ease and travel is a genuinely simulated connotation. I once was a guest on an ecological farm for avocados in Southern Spain and found a comrade in arms for this painstaking issue. Nine said, that she would sometimes like to just stuff the mouths of German burgers when they start their domestic chants of simulated envy. "Well, your life doesn't know such gravity, you are a travelling type. For you, the sun is always shining. If not, you just travel to the place where it is. And you seem to have loads of friends. None can hurt you. You lose a friend, you continue your life-long trip and get friends with another one." You are a

travelling type, I repeated to myself and could not figure out why now this made stroll my imagination through unfathomable voids of human contact in the Ural mountains. Now I recognised that inner voice. It was the ticket collector from Kyn station. "you are a travelling type. That's the sort which contracts AIDS first. How disgusting to sleep with such a person, even if you use a condom. That's not what I love." Blasted, for such people Friedrich Nietzsche's travelling to Italy and contracting syphilis is one and the same incidence. How do they imagine our travelling to be like, I ask myself. Personally, I have never, never had sex with anybody I met while travelling. If you are not out for buying, cheating or violating, sex simply does not happen when travelling seriously. It is not an issue. There is all kinds of closeness. Maybe a kind of closeness the burger never sees and feels and to be honest does not want to see and feel, really. But not that kind of closeness you would actually risk a pregnancy for or, well, sexually infectious diseases. Somehow, the Pfahlburger gets seriously mixed up what is to happen on his and her domestic little holiday with the back seat of their car, a hotel distracting their kids and regular meals. This is one world and they seem to quietly assume the other one completely opposed to be just of the same making. That is the reason for all their stupid talk about the "one world" throughout the damned 1990s. Among other fatal misunderstandings, they are positively convinced that the life you have to lead when throwing in one continent for another is just like theirs, just a little bit more free, more ideal, more holiday-like. Can they understand what it means, when you are materially forced to be spitting on your upbringing, your school, your privileges, your prejudices just to be able to survive as a social being, come out of the ordeal of travelling as someone who is still able to relate

somehow, perceive and react to other's needs and not only buy food, buy peace, buy company, an egomania machine for cross-cultural consumption.

Take my best friend from school for example, unconventionally Danish, though with astonishing bourgeois sophistication. She has actually taught me how to make love out of a fond of experience I could only marvel at then and now. However, I cannot remember her characterising any of her children with her long-standing lover of the past decade as being planned. Try such a strategy when relating in another continent and you will be quite ruined for your life within a fortnight. Luckily for my horizons always tending to get terribly narrow in the course of the years by uncouth and dogmatic principles and the fervent desire to betrayal my class origin at least if I really cannot strip it off like the skin of a snake, she keeps me up to date with how the established world of German middle classes chooses to dispose of its nauseating purchasing power. "Holidaymaking" she would declare with a sly irony, "is just a shameful word for having all-day-all-night sex." Sometimes I ask myself, whether I could actually return and live in that country any more. Every a few years or so, I try it out for some time, even for two weeks or less. It works. You can actually boil all your senses down, start again, repair that bicycle you left there on the last day of school. Well, school continued for another month but I would not care, I was off to France already, studying handbooks about gardening in the tropics with a fervour maybe as if to get the satisfaction out of Tolstoyian work, which my class of origin casually associates with, yes with holidaymaking maybe. I sought for Tolstoj (Tolstoy) and found Orwell, down and out. I did not find a lot of satisfaction to be sure. I found monstrous contradictions, frustration, depression,

shortage of money, comrades, new work, nothing stable, nothing reliable – a world to devour you and be devoured. To put a thousand turning points straight, I found the reality of contemporary Capitalist class war. I approached it from two sides, to be sure. For in many respects its reality is by far too brutal to be continually snobbish about the wrong side of your upbringing.

-“Fine” she resumed into my thoughts. “I planned to move around in the next days, so I could not put you up any more anyway. Where are you going in the Altaj Mountains?”

I was glad she had interrupted me. This was heading towards an unsupportable hermeneutic of self-commiseration again. Now was the time to confess, that my travelling was based on a map of the scale 1:4 million. My Ural experience was e.g. perfectly localisable within a tiny square centimetre of that table-flooding giant piece of paper. Mind, that it showed only western Siberia, not even lake Bajkal, as someone had quite recently presumed from a Carpathian perspective. I could divine from that outer space perspective on Siberia, that the Higher Altaj Republic alone was greater than the whole of what I know from Germany. Its capital, Gorno-Altajsk was marked just on the northern border at the exit of one of the few valleys accessible to road traffic from the Siberian plains. The population of that capital did not considerably outnumber a thousandth piece of Moscow and would be housed comfortably in one single modest street of the Federal Capital. We exchanged some opinions on what the map revealed and what it did not reveal.

-“It is all very far apart up there,” Larissa warned me. I did get some occasion to remember these words of her during the following days.

-“Normally, you only go up there in good company, don’t you?” I inquired exploringly. I still believe that my question

was quite innocent. I would rather not want to suggest that Larissa's duties for her guest extended over a terrain comparable to the extensions of Western Europe. Quite probably, I rather wanted to calm my bad conscience. Maybe again, I thought that my planning to go there alone stemmed from my class origin, the selectively blind individualism of Western German provincial middle class. I knew that it was materially based on the deception that we think we can master what we can purchase with our currency. On the other side, I had been hearing soviet stories about Altaj expeditions for years and years which were always, always done in company. The uncle of Elena from Irkutsk had presumably drunk from a little standing water in the forests and not recognized in time that a dead animal was polluting the source. He had died three days afterwards. On a dark early autumn night in 2002, just south of Riga, I was addressed by a Siberian who recognised that my linen rucksack was a standard soviet model. "That is the one, I took for walking in the Altaj Mountain range in those soviet years." He exclaimed in a very unlatvian, cosmopolitan soviet friendliness. "So you do not go there any more now", I asked with rising interest. "No way," he answered, "there are people specialised in picking up excursionists and you can be happy if they spare your life." Indeed a week later, I heard about an Omsk journalist who got killed just for some cash a few valleys away from where I slept in the green. Yet, I had asked Larissa about companies preparing themselves for excursions into the area mainly to get her benediction for my individualist plans, I guess. I wanted to hear from her simply a warning assurance. "Go, but be careful", something of that sort. But she would not say that. Instead, she would think so intensely, consider, reconsider, that I could almost feel the physiological side of the process near

me. Oh no, I thought. Don't do that! Don't declare you will go with me just because you feel sorry for my naiveté. You have not allowed me to do the washing up, "because guest do not wash at our place". That's bloody patriarchy. You have not told me that you are tired of Moscow and European acquaintances and the lot, though I see it in the movements of your eyes. You have given enough. Don't do that.

-“Listen,” she said after a long process, taking a final decision.

-“Listen, in four days I will take you to a place in the woods near a river. My friends will be there, very good friends, my best friends actually. We organise a training camp for the Communist party youth. I take you with me. Be back in four days and we will go together.”

I had no words. I would not even start to dissuade her German-style: but maybe you should think about it, do you really want me there? You say your best friends. It does not take a very subtle faculty of observation to know that I am not one of them. Not yet. Why do I call that German-style? Am I really entitled to dump so much shit on a country I haven't really cared for in a decade?

When the friend of my heart, Oliver, came back to Heidelberg after a year in the United States around 1987, he met an old acquaintance in the city centre. I can vividly imagine him retranslating the warm American words “How are you?” into the German he was relearning and stretching out to shake hands. Any civil American, even after having received a cancer diagnosis would shake hands warmly and answer with a smile over the whole face “I am fine, thanks, and you?” They do not only say so because they respect you. There is a bit more to it. Who has spent a winter in New York climate knows that these people could not

possibly make it there just with that one powerful faculty to kill Indians and advance the white race west. That might take you through the autumn, but not through an East coast winter. So they have got this peculiar sentimentality about Thanksgiving. I know it is all messed up in a mass of plastic, now. The most prominent mass murderer of present days releases a turkey from the zoo in Washington taking his willing combat sponsors to tears, while tens of millions of its equals are slaughtered by fully automatic machines, processing and deep-freezing their corpses within seconds for just the same occasion, filling the tables of national Thanksgiving, adding another heap of affluence to a mindless affluence which is capable of killing our equals all over the globe, not only in Iraq. But there is that sentimental kernel about Thanksgiving and none of my hatred for the so-called “American way of Life” and its deadly consequences can wipe that it in my consciousness. The first settlers from Europe in New England were poor underdogs really, spat out from one of the cruellest class societies of modern times with nothing to cling to than crazy religious principles. They were actually dying a slow death of starvation in their praised “New World”. With their religious idiocy alone, they would never have made it until next spring. They were in terrible need of a helping hand and their white God’s one would somehow not take the trouble to do anything. So they had to take and shake the hands of beings, they utterly comprehended: Indians, redskins, devil like creatures with eyes acutely similar to those overlooking today’s Altaj, to those in front of me at the kitchen table, actually. Oliver put his hand forward out of New-Wordly custom and amiability. His friend stepped back and said a very upper-class German sentence, which is basically untranslatable: “Man gibt sich die Hand?” I cannot even tell whether she was really upper class. Some of the

dead language of the Goethe/Schiller classics can actually be picked up in German high school if you are a willing climber. I cannot translate that, however. It could have meant something close to “What the hell is the reason for your being so bloody friendly after that year, you interested bastard?” Here I sat as far away from Heidelberg as our beloved New York. So I did not even bother to translate the fingerprints of my German socialisation into Russian that night. However I still wondered slightly, what had made Larissa consider this invitation so lengthily and what had really made her invite me in the end. Eventually the transmutations of this initial curiosity was the source of endless misunderstandings and, to be honest, an infectious sadness in an emotional and prospective sense. Politically, it was the conclusion of a long-standing promise, the one given to me by a jobless Pravda journalist to the day 15 years before. I was eager to follow the line.

All the while, the political police units of lower Altaj charged with repressing anti-capitalist potentials wherever they show up were already spinning a net of investigation and informants to localise the rebel camp and destroy its contagious potential. The forests of Russia may be spacious, but they are not free terrain to stroll in liberally. The last seasons have seen the crack-down on a genuinely anti-political forest reverie called “the ferry temple”. In the Anglo-Saxon world ferries have become a code name and a dress code for insinuatingly malignant anti-capitalist protesters. I remember the nights in the Scottish police cell, when my cell neighbour was driving his jail masters mad with the chant “But you arrested me for hugging a fairy!” He had bloody blocked a road around the G8 and subsequently resisted arrest.

Russian ferries are not quite that clever in their way to attack the hardly fairy-friendly world of Capital reign. They only retreat... into the Russian woodlands. There they meet, hundreds of them, put on their true wings and fluffy dressings, wave their silk and emanate their obnoxious perfumes. It is as if they were living a life of disguise for the rest of the year just to breathe the air of pure and sweetish ventilation in remote settings for some precious, fulfilling weeks of summer idle. They build wooden castles, relate to princes of the tales named after them and swarm about in fluffy flocks of hundreds. Well, this might be actually quite funny. However with the exception of two groups which are not negligible in the story. In the first place, it is not funny for the fairies themselves and it is definitively not funny for the Russian police forces.

Instead of being let to realise a summer long collective orgasm of escapism the last big fairy gathering in Russia has become a sea of tears. Special anti-riot forces cracked down on the event, localised operationally by helicopters and ground control in a paramilitary operation. The wooden castle was destroyed and the elements arrested to be put to a treatment as if they were a resurrection of the Decembrists, executed by the Russian autocracy one and a half centuries earlier. All this, I did not know by that time.

I did know that Gasprom had passed firmly into partly control of German capital and that it was indeed high time to associate on the other side of the barricade as well.

I mentioned, that us two generations shared the tiny flat sovereignly that night. Larissa's sister was out in the mountains, so we had our half for ourselves. I got the bed of her sister, where Larissa had slept in after her 4 day train

ride from Moscow and Larissa herself moved on to the next room on a canapé. It reminded me of my brother and me once before we dissolved our friendship stemming from our childhood just a year ago. He and me would always move out of our bed for our guest. "Siberians love to sleep softly" Čehov wrote a century ago. He was damned true wherever I got. So I lay in her bed like in mountains of raspberries. Through the open door I could hear Larissa breathing. Somehow, I must have forgotten that my place of birth is 6000 km west. I strangely felt to be right there, i.e. just in the place I had been born to that many years ago. So on the next day, I readily got onto a bus towards China, gaining the Altaj heights.

9. a night of compulsory adoration

I cannot help the feeling to want to narrate the days in the Altaj heights as briefly and quickly as possible to come back to the plains, Bijsk, my comrade. I was as if put on a waiting loop, yet in one of the most fascinating places of the earth. Time was short and efficient transport asphalt-bound. So the first 32 hours were actually a nightmare of running to gain access. There would be hardly any break to the cold rain the first day. I would never see anything else than the feet of mountains, all the rest was covered in clouds. Nauseatingly disappointed, I stumbled across the rural trifles of the capital settlement at the entrance gate to the Plateau. It was not yet 3 o'clock in the afternoon local time and the days motion had already collapsed. No bus any more. No answer to any practical question. Time-table? Reservation? Alternative transport? Guesthouse? Something different to eat than fast-food? I simply could not get any answer whatsoever. The Altaj majority was

socialising visibly among itself and the few Russians I could get hold of seemed to be day-dreaming and counting sheep in some realms of federal elision. I don't know what you feel when a Russian answers to a basic question, lets say about the meaning of a notice board saying "hotel" above his door "bez ponjatija (without a clue, thanks Shirley for correcting this one, too)". I just feel helpless. What can you say to abuse him? Nothing than to repeat his words. "My dear friend, you seem to be without a clue." That is not satisfactory. A potential victim for swear-words who tells you everything you could tell him in a bad temper with his own calm words is just too much for a raging stranger. So I took to medieval practice. I circled around the central bus stop seven times widdershins and seven times shins, asking randomly everybody about everything which was on my mind. And finally, I understood a bit more. There was a little car going up on 1500 m heigt, passing mountain ranges rising far above 3000 metres. Its trail to one of the rajon centres in the south-east was to last some 10 hours and transgress some 800 km, the last part remaining entirely without asphalt. Ust-Ulagan⁴ was to be a boring outpost of Russian colonialism with native Altaj people endemically drinking and beating up foreigners to come to money. The only way out of this hell of criminality and untameable wilderness by public transport was to return exactly the way I would go first, no other connection to the world around, no public through-traffic, no guarantee of a place to sleep. I threw in a breathtaking proportion of my pocket/money and bought a single ride ticket up there. "You do not want to reserve a place to come down again?" the ticket seller asked with disbelieve. "No," I pretended, I

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<http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A3%D1%81%D1%82%D1%8C-%D0%A3%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%BD>

will be quite comfortable hitch-hiking further towards Mongolia. My counterpart visibly gave up my case and sold me the ticket for the next morning mechanically. My luggage alone was checked in for the price of some 12 adult passenger tram rides in the town of Bijsk. I had delivered my throat to the outmost edge of the Russian nightmare and I was determined to be happy with it. As for the rain, I had little worries. Rumours had it that everything above 2500 meters was already covered in thick, new autumns' snow now, on 10th of August, and this snow was not to melt again until end of July next year, according to authoritative locals. It would just descend further down now, they assured with the deep voices of an Altaj shamanist oracle.

I could not find any hotel, though there were quite some signs announcing them. In the end, I got the footpath description of a state guesthouse for kids whom nobody would let further into these mountains to learn something about their fragile ecology there. The path lead over a wild river by the help of a hanging bridge. To reach the bridge, I had to go half a kilometre downstream and then go upwards again. If this was the capital, I was not in the mood to figure out what its province would look like. But before closing my eyes to dive into it, I wanted to have a last, civilised sleep, something like white linen and evening reading of Kropotkin's expeditions into unknown Manchuria. This, as I would learn later, was a vain hope. There was no sleep for me that night. It all started very occasionally, like a stupid little affair. Checking in after a prolonged walk through the rain, I noticed that the registering Altaj, was actually quite young. She would be very formal though. It was only 4 o'clock but the rain was dense as a continual shower and

there was no use bumping about under those clouds. I got myself drippingly into the room, given to me, put the table in front of the window and started to learn Chinese vocabulary. I love to learn Chinese vocabulary as much as fiddling dilettantly on my violin. I discovered my extraordinary liking for these two past-times right when my Polish friend started to date with her new lover for weeks without coming back to our joint flat. She would not always tell me with whom, but she always told me where she was going, to a romantic wood, to the island of Wolin. To Hamburg, to Kiel. I was tied to the flat then, forced to finish a work which I could not even support to look at. And for two months I did hardly anything else I can remember except for trying to learn Chinese vocabulary and fiddling from 6 in the morning to 10 at night. When I had to be afraid to get a reasonable complaint about this dilettante fiddling, I would escape to the Vistula river and take to torture the ears of by-passers. Quite funnily, it hardly occurred to me that my dilettantism on the violin could be actually insulting. I liked it immensely. The sheer traumatic vagueness in which the cords scratched by my bow responded to my clumsy finger play corresponded perfectly with my vision of the world in ruins. Let me just get free of this damned workload, I told myself and I will take to China. "Taking to China" was about as false as my play. I had no friends there, no contacts, no clue how to get around there. I did not even know a dozen of signs or words with which to communicate basically. I told you that I learned for six or eight hours without breaks. Indeed, I employed various techniques, exploited my pleasure in brushwork to cheat my way to writing through calligraphic exercises, I read aloud, Heard hundreds of hours of Chinese recordings, many of them corresponding to my lessons. I consulted a private teacher twice a week. But the

effect was close to nothing. My head would immensely enjoy to be filled up with signs and sounds, movements and pronunciations of this distant language, yet somehow overnight, it would empty itself mysteriously as if continually pissing it all out again onto my bedclothes. I did not feel the slightest unease with this balanced nothingness. It was the perfect reflection of my emotional failures, accumulated over a decade. Fiddling without reaching tones and learning Chinese without remembering words were the comforting guiding stars of my tacit exasperation. All the time in the silent rooms of a full Warsaw summer, I would not be able to do a stroke of the work which I had to do. Deadline was drawing closer like a gentle warm summer flood streaming around my throat. Well, I had one other activity which could absorb me for some hours a day, which was letter-writing to the most fundamentalist Protestant Berlin Lesbian I have ever known. Once she told me on the telephone that she would not bother to answer these letters as agreed before, because she had the suspicion that I was only writing them to publish them later as a book. I was a bit disappointed that her literary taste was so modest, that she might believe that actually anybody wanted to print or read such texts if they were not written precisely for him or her. Well, these letters were precisely written for him or her and they missed the point completely. I had realised that by the time I came to number 43. I desperately wanted to communicate with someone and in the end only my fiddle seemed to respond to my efforts. I cannot describe these months as being unhappy. I rarely succeeded in reaching such an ambitionless tête-à-tête with nothingness in my life before.

There was a knock at the door. The Altaj receptionist entered politely with delicate and a bit demonstrative

movements. She saw the new arrangement of the table, walked past smiling and quietly put down some bed cloth. “As in a train, you know” she would declare, cryptically. Only after I had heard this formula three more times through the corridor, each time another guest for the night got his room, I understood that she was explaining a little lazy caprice of her own. She imagined a hotel like the one she was working for to provide bedclothes being prepared for the guests already. Her formula “As in a train, you know” never changing and uttered with an air as if to excuse herself meant that she was not prepared to do what she herself thought to be her duty. Excused her as well. There is no problem in having some 5 minutes of work for your own well-being. I am actually opposed to any notion of service. My senses are vibrating with satisfaction when I encounter the last species of careless waiters and guest house personal in the Eastern hemisphere. Once, being unfriendly to your guests in public places was a class privilege of a whole army of waiters and hotel personal who worked independently of the fits and feelings of their clients. They did not need to care. Capitalist reinvention of their working role as a serving role has changed this fundamentally. Smiles out of financial loyalty are a nightmare actually, for those who receive them and for those who issue them. I often dream of the time when revolution will introduce a new functional rudeness in all former servicing trades. This was a bit too much theory for one young Altaj housekeeper. I actually failed to register in how far her behaviour was far from servile or not servile. Looking back later, I registered in how far it was schematic and not reactive to the situation. This should have given me a warning, but I would not heed to it then.

Back alone with my bedclothes prepared for the night and still half way to go in time through the Chinese lesson, I felt actually quite grateful for this failed summer when I started courses. Maybe real break-downs can only happen in the midst of fulfilment. The long-standing austere absence of fulfilment lacks the critical emotional mass to generate any movement, including anything of the sort of a break-down. So just a 1000 mountainous kilometres in front of the year-long aim, China, I halted to re-hibernate into the mindless void of my knowledge of Chinese. After 10 o'clock at night, I dived up again from this state with difficulty and the feeling of pity, as if my mother had dragged me out of the sand-pitch by force (what she rarely did). My mother did not even pressure me to go to kindergarten in time. She allowed me to brawl around for hours in the morning, forgetting myself in endless slopes of play, imagination and boredom, take false ways and detours of a truly escapist dimension. She would kindly wait for me to live my fits to their very end and return, satisfied, to the gardens of peer sociability, which I actually quite enjoyed once I was there. Oh, follies of bourgeois upbringing! My mother taught me how to stroll into a sunny day with nothing on my mind than an illuminating stupor of vague apprehension. What I understood then, I could not tell. I was wordless, my mother used to say. She observed me how I had something seemingly important on my mind but could not tell which made me go red and blue with rage and exasperation. Not having the words for it is a basic horror, I know to be inscribed into my nerves. It might actually be conneted with my father never being around but that is post-factum speculation. The only thin I lean from the suspicion is not to be absent as my father was absent. He was a notorious traveller to China, by the way, one of those theoretically negligent Maoists populating assistant jobs of Western

German Universities in the 1970s. So I had a problem with finding words but I had almost no exterior problem with finding time. I was granted time as only kings and princes might have been granted time in the past. I think many children got what I got, the astonishing material well-being of the 1970, never to return after the destructions of Thatcherism, Reagenomics a peculiar imitation, the “geistig-moralische Wende” of doctor Helmut Kohl.

I got time and freedom in hilarious dimensions. But my mother did not teach me a single time how to wipe a floor, how to tighten canvas, how to chalk the fond of an oil-painting, though she is a painter by trade and training.

I got to sleep, I meant it. I was tired of being with myself. To tell the truth, after Bijsk I felt terribly lonesome.

But sleep was not meant for me that night. I started to understand that when the door suddenly opened without so much as a knocking and the light was turned on to a full and hurting brightness.

“What is that?” a voice shouted at me. I startled. “I fine you!” She repeated her cry as if dealing out strokes with a whip on my half awoken body. “Straf, straf, straf” she assured herself. I asked why and found out that she had already met her aim, my voice was too late. She had already reassured herself with the sheer mechanical violence her delicate body was able to produce. “You have moved the table, that’s forbidden. I will make you pay, I can tell you.” The following three hours were a failure on my part. I reached with calm hatred to her assault. That was exactly what she did not want. She wanted either breathless hatred, such as hers or calm adoration. Nothing in between. She would not act in any way acceptably again until I accepted

this tacit rule of hers. I reminded her, that she had seen the arrangement at 7 o'clock in the evening and could have said a word, couldn't she? She would not give in a millimetre. I required a written document saying that moving a table from a to b inside the rooms is liable to a fine. She went away and I thought that there was probably some peace to be found before negotiations would reassume in the early morning. She knew that my bus was leaving very early and that it was the only one in the whole day. So she would probably use this card. Strangely enough, I did not register, that she had already handed back my passport. I calculated how much she would take until letting me go. After half an hour she stumbled into my room again, this time without putting on the light. She carefully arranged a sheet of paper on which she had just made up new rules and new fines on her reception computer. I was quite amused at this playful mistake of hers. She issued documents without a director's signature. That could take the air out of her attack. I told her so when going to the toilet. The toilets had a strange notice as well. Forbidden to be used between 6:00 o'clock in the morning and 23:00 o'clock at night. Maybe she had done all these new rules in one go. There was something clearly uncanny in her stile of administration. Furthermore, she would not sleep, she would walk around, in and out. I decided to cut a long story short and to silently lift the table back again where it stood. It was all so easy. I lay down and looked at the ceiling. How much aggression was there in this woman under the thin egg-peel of false, schematic nicety. I felt a bit like after a light traffic accident, not a collision but surely a moderate avaria. It took her an hour before she returned to my case. Same procedure. Enter without knocking, turning on the light. Now she cried at the pitch of her voice. "You have put the table back. How can you. You had no right to do so." And she continued

with a lament, for now surely, the whole guest/house was awake. "I want to sleep at night" she wailed. "And you make it impossible. How can you dare and shift a table in the middle of the night! I will not register you. I will not register you until you pay the fine you deserve. I will see to that." I felt that she was loosing ground. She had no prove any more. The table was at its normal place. She did not even have my passport any more as I noticed now. She would not have raised the side issue of registration if she had had such a powerful weapon in her hand as withholding my passport. Without a passport in Russia, you are reduced to nothing. You cannot buy a ticket, you cannot pass a police control, you cannot leave luggage, you cannot change money, you are immobilised and you have to prepare for extreme humiliation. She could not do that to me. I saw it clearly now, that the factual side of the conflict was won. I wondered whether she would get any fine money pout of me at all. The affair had tuned into a sportive contest and I had a hearty laugh for every new offensive. When she came in for a remake, turned on the light and approached my bedside where my tormented body was learning to lie indifferent under the beats of her voice, I had a sudden idea. "Maybe" I guessed "You have fallen in love with me. I could help you then." I wondered what I had in mind with 'help you'. But she was retorting simultaneously. "No you, you," she cried "You have fallen in love with me." This was kindergarten, then. It acutely reminded me of a strive between two friends in 1976 where one started singing, that her parents had a camper van and the other one's parents hadn't. I remembered my resolution on obsessive talk and answered. "I do not know yet whether I love you, but I can find out."
- "How will you find out?"

-“I will paint a portrait of you. Then I will be able to tell you.”

-“You mean you will find out whether I am beautiful?” Oh goodness, she was so full of complexes and so unripe. It hurt me physically. “No, I explained calmly. It is rather the other way round. You know, if I would love, I would love your body just as your character.” Funnily enough, this brought her back on the barricades. “So object to my character, yes. Well, I cannot help you. That is the way I am, I am tough, I am a beast of toughness. Take that!” “I like whoever I love to be tough and smart. What comes out when I paint you is more complicated. When I paint badly, I have a fancy. When I paint well, I look from a distance and not much can harm me. That is the way to find out.” “O.k.” she said simply and I followed her into her reception room.

There was a little bit of a calculating spirit behind this abracadabra. I felt that the night's sleep had gone down the drain anyway and I knew that I had 10 canvasses, which is a lot for 4 days when you travel something close to 2000 km. From Cuban nights I had learned, that my old Cuban formats, done in November 2003 had a very lucky chalk-linseed oil consistence. Such canvas does half of the painting. You can let go, every caprice is good enough to keep the brushstrokes light. I felt confident and professionally inspired by all that circus over the better half of the night. There were 4 hours left. I worked with my eyes now and paid little attention on de-conspiring her previous attack. Her cabinet reminded me of a mineral collection. But instead of dead stones, she had spent the evening and the night to collect adorators from the male sex. I made my way through their bodies spread about in her room. Some of them were very subtle but incredibly

conservative. They would spend hours to engineer compliments of the most unspecific kind. It was as if they paid their night with her with flattery. Most of them were from Novosibirsk. They had obviously trained this kind of conversation with women for half of their lives. I found it all excessively boring. Basically, it was about her not wanting to be photographed. I registered, that I had a little favour of her, because painting a portrait was perfectly o.k. in her obsessively capricious little world. I groaned to myself at the idea that I would be a woman in this macho hell of Russia. I would, yes I would get away, get out of it any way, at any price. Well, that is speculation. The task I had set myself was more down to earth. I had to coax her into reducing her cornered movements, try to convince her to stay on one side of the light. Well, the light was a pity anyway. It is always a pity not to paint in sunlight. There is so much less substance getting palpitable under electric lights. I tried my best and got her with bravery. No trace of love, as for me at least. Yet, I think that the bravura of male compliment filling the night time holes of conversation nicely, coldly and with an obnoxious, constant insinuation was equally an indicator for the perfectly ignored absence of any real feeling. Into this void, she said sentences which I believe she has been repeating for years in her place of work. It was all made to spurn adoration and it all missed the point. She was talking about her stories in Altaj language, which she published in the newspaper. She told about her university career, did not forget to mention that her dancing talents had made her join a tourney around Europe. At one point, I was feeling really sorry for her. It was when she tried to speak about the poems she writes and was so unwise to try to recite one. She got stuck. She did not remember. And then she commented herself sharply. "Not a convincing thing to get stuck with your

own poems, is it? She was so terribly unsure, irritated. Speaking about her face, her body, the repressive sexist character of the Russian talk about female beauty turned up like a dying dolphin on the surface of the sea. Age and ripening is unacceptable for the male Russian cult of youth, male disrespect and male ignorance are the malicious revenge against experienced women for the flattering credit dealt out to any available inexperience.

She was working against a hill now. "I am praising myself" she remarked, and as if citing her grandmother's counsels "that is bad, it looks as if I was dependent on your opinion." I rather cheered her now, silently. I had the vision, that she could be independent; she understood the mill she was caught in. But she was grinding on. Complements hailed down listlessly on her. In the end, when nothing seemed to work any more, she started to boast of her husband, of her luck and happiness to be married. I felt slightly sick from lack of sleep.

After having got the dark accents on the Cuban tested surface in their places, I retreated to have my things ready for the early morning bus. Everybody was hastily getting out of her room now. It was as if the end of my work had made it finally inappropriate for the majority to hang around her bedside any more. An hour later, I saw with a clear morning eye, how a youngster with a rather pale and somehow brutal looking visage came out of her cabinet, getting his trousers right with an occasional and firm movement claiming importance. He fixed me with a rude air and turned his face slightly up so to let me glance at his head from a lowered perspective, a very effective tool you can observe with certain eastern European male types who pay very much attention to make you believe that they are

on the winning side. When I had my luggage ready and it was time to go, the housekeeper was sitting behind her window with an air of subdued professional humility. Without doubt she was very tired. I understood that she had an awful job and no training to economise her forces. That made her a victim, not only to male compliments but to her own ambition. She was full of talents and a very sound ambition to make them heard. But the way she took was just right to ruin her resources at a breathtaking speed. Or maybe, I had not understood her true reserves. Possible.

Weeks later, I asked myself why her nightly attacks had been rather acceptable to me and I came across the memory of the African cook at my French workplace. She was a terrible cook. Once over a week, some colleagues and I registered that she had dumped so much oil in our food that by half of the week everyone had swallowed an average of two glasses. Only after she was fired I learned that she had slept with almost everybody in the establishment and many conflicts in our centre, e.g. between Christian and Moslem Africans were really faction fights of jealousy. I marvelled how all this extreme activity could possibly have omitted my attention and I found no answer. I remember clearly however, that she had a tendency to attack me for unbelievable trifles with a fervour and persistence I could not explain at that time. Having travelled the United States, I learned to pay more attention to the superposition of triple oppression: discrimination of working-classes, women and racial discrimination. I am quite convinced that French African cook just as the Russian Altaj housekeeper were suffering excessively from all three modes of repression. Their compensational strategy was astonishingly similar. They would assume a stiff authoritarian and despotic attitude

which would only compromise in the case of being offered sexualised complements and reverence. To the difference of middle class women of equally authoritarian socialisation, such emotional economy would not keep to common conventions of accumulating symbols of respectability. Instead, maximalising success within the compensational strategy resulted in intense instrumentalisation and maybe exploitation of the body and the mind. In “The grass is singing”, a school lecture I owe to my Australian education, Doris Lessing has portrait the neurotic consequences of slave labour in an erotic relation between mistress and servant. The inhuman tension of physical closeness and forceful social distance leads to male aggression in the case documented by Lessing. The female outlet in a form of arbitrary tyranny seems more stable, nevertheless. It puts, as in Lessing’s study, the price at the expense of the female body. The question of structural racism against Altaj aborigines for the benefit of heirs to the Russian colonial system is a black spot in the analyses of the regional, traditional left.

With a little shock, I noticed that there was now only minimal time left to go down the river, take the hanging bridge and go up on the other side. I asked for my reservation and put special attention on the tricky task to keep any demanding notion out of my voice. She would not give it to me. “Why?” I asked casually, and then I heard myself continue with that lightness only a morning can give you and which you cannot invent beforehand “are you still cross with me for that table?” “No,” she answered plainly. I believed her. But, slightly letting her tongue get between her teeth, she then explained “I do not know how to do that. I am afraid, I will make a mistake.” Now, I clearly felt

the nerves around my eyeballs shiver from lack of sleep and a grinding feeling of helplessness set in on me.

So, I wished her a nice and sunny day, a pleasant walk home and many new and fine poems to be published in the newspaper of the Altaj Republic. I thanked her for the amiable atmosphere with which she provides the guesthouse and especially for her patience at sitting for the portrait. "But", she broke my flow of carefully desexualised compliments, "will you really send me a copy of your picture? Won't you forget me as soon as you get out of this town?" I decided to be finally a bit more economical with my words. I thought about an appropriate answer, which would be at once true and brief. It took some time and then I said "no".

10. Asian mountains - **Asian rivers**

The small carrier was already packed with people and luggage. I was the only European. The village of Ust-Ulagan has a largely Altaj population of 2000, of which only one tenth claim an exclusively Russian background. However, higher functions such as in the police force, the fire fighters, the administration, school and a proportion of small business is practically inaccessible for Altaj people. However, no matter how hard I tried in Altaj-only discussion circles, I could not detect any practice or interest in linking issues of ethnicity and issues of power. In a very plain way, my Altaj informants would refuse to take up my provocations and stress instead, that e.g. many of their friends and workmate were Russian, that many Russians have to work hard as well, etc. All in all, no Western money

seems to have been invested effectively in transforming social issues into ethnicised assets in the Autonomous Republic of Altaj. I was quite astonished by the firmness of the replies I got. Principally, this could be the state of discussion e.g. in Ukraine now. Judging by statistical and material indicators the case for camouflaging ethnic division as a viable form of voicing social aspirations has more basis in the Altaj republic than in Ukraine. Evidently, investing in such battles is not a question of the available material pretexts but rather of material chances to enforce division until a beneficial end, when investment in polarisation along ethnic lines pays out, with or without Western support.

We came through valleys of giant, reddish slopes. We spent hours cooling down the boiling motor with icy bottles, filled under the outcome of thundering waterfalls going down towards us in hundreds of metres of almost free fall. We poked through layers of clouds and mist to dissolve our subdued senses finally in an obnoxious transparency of crystalline, chilly air giving way to our glances: upon eternal ice, glaciers of majestic remoteness, hosting shadows of green in their fantastic closeness to the light of the sun. I looked back in our vehicle. I saw into sun-burnt faces of incomprehensible Asian calm and observation. No words. This was their land, their hights and falls. The incredible vertical movements of our streets were a subtle shake of their heads, not more. Their lively eyes protected by slyly slimmest lids would not need to cramp for protection when facing the bold reflections from those hilarious meadows of snow that never melt. But the greatest impact made their reflected immensities in the majestic Asian riverbeds, gurgling and turning over, beating foam and carrying with them stones and rocks in their irresistible stream downhill,

some of them weighing tons and groaning repetitively once in a while with roars of impact unmuffled by the overturning water masses and resounding through the gigantic valleys we had to pass.

Horseback riders overtook us, when we were fighting with the inaptitude of a Japanese motor to cope with Altaj's vertical dimensions. They were sitting in such a clever rhythm that their horses' backs seemed to pop up only once in a while to keep them in their most elegant trajectory position. Everything about them was moving bumpily and shaking in the thrill of speed. Only they were gliding stably through the late afternoon air. I saw tents tended by nomads; I saw Asian cattle and cooking over fire. I saw colours dripping with the tickle of the evening approaching into a sea of dark intensity as if submerging under that eternal water, conjured by the English Romantics when their bodies gave way to the last prolonged and calm spasms of decay inspired by Asian opium. Here the venoms of their deaths came from, here their imagination finally returned home. This is the mother of the earth, the roof of the world.

I arrived at Ust-Ulagan with a quiet in my senses as if I would only now hear and understand the first words in my life. Everything seemed simple, true and unpretentious. Ulagan is a veritable ice-pole in the immensely chilly body of colonial Russia. The air of far Northern Siberia might actually collapse down to a monstrosity of 40 degrees minus zero during the peak of a polar night. But Ust-Ulagan had minus 50 just last winter. The huts and banjas, carefully imitating the form of traditional tents in Russian block-house technique look as if they peeled out of immense snow and ice last week and would re-submerge

again the other week for almost another year. Their wood is greyish, their forms betray the immense pressure of masses of snow and ice piling above them in a winter's night. I was taken to the fire-fighters of the rajon to have a look at their map. "If you definitely will not want to return with us tomorrow morning," our driver said warningly, "you will have to pass through this, towards Russian Tibet and down with the water from Mongolia towards this lake, Teleckoe ozoro." It is the second biggest sweet water reservoir in the world after Lake Bajkal, as I learnt later. "There might be a boat taking you some 100 km over the lake to reach Bijsk again." I nodded deferently, though I clearly noticed that the way he had showed me on the map went over peaks of nearly 3000 m above sea level and this could hardly be the trail the locals would prefer. Well, he was a public bus driver from the capital and his machine was already at the edge of its possibilities in climbing up here. I would have to ask a lot more people. I went around the wooden building and saw a writing above the door. "Delegation for inner affairs", it said, vnutyrych del, VD, formerly NKVD. I imagined how the officers had picked out of the settlement their compulsory quota of Trotskyists and Japanese spies in 1937, I imagined their damp warm blood run down the cold wooden walls of the building after the first interrogation to baptize the Russian National Revolution and I could not bear the thought. This climate, this frosty air in mid August was somehow already at the edge of comprehensible brutality. I could not really support the idea that man would add to this still.

I ignored my ideological reservations to administrations of inner affairs and tried to ask for a way through the mountains. The officer on duty arrested me immediately. I asked for the reason. There was no reason. I asked for the

head of the rajon. A Russian turned up. "According to the laws of the Russian Federation you are obliged to motivate my arrest. Why do you take me in custody?" I asked with a leaned sentence from the days of protest against the G8 in Russia. The commander however was obviously not trained to respond to such rebellious talk. He even looked helpless for a moment. Then, he took to sophism. "We arrested you because we arrested you. You are a foreigner, you know. We do not get many foreigners up here, you know. Terrorism, you know. The world is full of enemies of Russia." "This is not a reason for arrest under the laws of the Russian Federation." I insisted. Our intercourse had obviously reached a dead point. "We will check your papers and then we will decide what to do with you over night." There was a little sting in my consciousness. My little friend down in the cute capital keeping me awake so laboriously over the night had not bothered to register me in the Autonomous Republic of Altaj. I was silent and waited. I waited for hours. The arrest was a come and go. The unusual stir by the sensation that they had got hold of a foreigner was cleverly used by an elder Altaj woman to walk out of the cell laughingly. She was caught and brought back only after actually leaving the building. All in all, I was reminded of a scene in the Wild West during the Indian wars. The prison commander a European, his victims representing all arrestable fractions of population with Asian origin, his torture assistants corrupted Red Sins. In the end my documents would be handed over to a woman for assessment. Obviously the men on service, including the commander would not trust their literacy as much as their fists for enforcing law and order up here. She was a scrupulous type. She would not let go. She would call the capital by satellite telephone. She would consider a monstrous fine and in the end, she would say simply "Let

him go!” “Really” the men would interrogate. “Let him go, I said.” There was no conversation about the reason why I was hold up and why I was now entitled to go. Nevertheless, the combined masculine police force of Ust-Ulagan let me go. I was a bit cross with them that they had not bothered to answer my initial question about the way through the mountains but I excused them to myself. They were obviously very busy in the capital settlement of the municipality and could not have an eye so intensely on the rest of their terrain of operation, actually larger than a good deal of the size of England.

I stumbled out of the administration building right into another queer treatment, a sweetish one this time though. There was actually some internet connection. I fingered a single personal mail out of a heap of spam. It was from the woman my comrades on the Ural railway lines would have surely called my girl-friend.

“Hello,” she wrote gaily. “I am hitch-hiking with Hauke through the Carpathian Mountains. Yesterday we had sex in the tent. Everything is fine.

But what is the matter with you? I would like you to write a bit more personal, to be honest. How can I know your real feelings if you only write so superficially?

By,
V.”

She had again ignored my pledge for a real mail address. I stepped out of the wooden hut called “Internet-café” and thought in the twilight why these famous Ust-Ulagan robbers hadn’t turned up yet to give me a well-measured hit on my forehead. The owner of the internet café just came

along to see how business was going with his boys on service. I stopped him and asked. "Please, tell me where these robbers are all of Moscow talks about. Or is it just a hype." "It is not a hype", the little Altaj man said calmly looking into my face, "I am the biggest one". "You are a gangster?" "Yes, the little man retorted seriously, "I am a big gangster. Please come with me. I want to find you a place where you will pass the night." We walked through the evening chill, not to a place to sleep at first, but to a place to work. My little gangster was doing some less illegal business alongside and had his mates build a new kiosk in the centre. "Have a drink with us" he ordered. "This is my best friend, a Russian, a worker from Tadzhikistan. He has made my mates go far up into the mountains to get yellow and grey stones for a mosaic all around the kiosk. He is a good worker, a mate. Let us drink." I did not drink. Anyway most of the workforce was indeed already excessively drunk and hilariously good-natured. They could not believe that I gave them postcards which had my own paintings printed on them. Even hours later, they would tell newcomers that I had painted those for them right on the spot. With the help of my little gangster, I then found a place to rest. A "hotel" tended by a very bright Jewish widow who rejoiced of her liberty and her "business activity" after having successfully buried a bullying Moslem husband at the end of a 14 years' ordeal. Her "hotel" was endemically empty and consisted of a room for herself and her daughter and two adjacent spaces with some bed constructions stuffed into them. My landlady was a delicate and experienced lady with a winning sense of humour. She said, that she kept on collecting tops of these little Vietnamese magic oil tins and when she had five (red) stars in her collection, she would nail them onto her door. Personally, I would give her not five but six stars. She had

even thought to place a set of sewing needles next to my bed, not to forget about a rice cooker, washing water, plates, spoons and a glass of drinking water. “I am sorry for you, that you come today”, she said apologising. “I am not in my best humour today, because I had to burry my sister this afternoon. See how red my eye-lids are. But I have stopped crying now.” I thought about me burying my own sister and hiring out a part of my flat some hours later and started to cry out immediately. Actually, it sounded a bit as Eva would have done it. Of course our learning in the last half year was perfectly mutual. With experienced care, my landlady investigated my little attack and gave me not Vietnamese oil this time, but the address of a healer, a friend of hers living right next door in Western Germany, just in case, my sister needed any support for her health. Well, she marvelled, turning over further pages in her impressive address-book. I have got protection, I can tell you. Business is no fun in this republic if you have not a serious network of protection, a roof, we call it. All right, down there in Russia, they have mafia, extortion, and paid murder. But our Autonomous Republic is just so much worse. You cannot imagine how much vampires I feed along with my little hotel and to be honest, this business activity is not precisely as rewarding or let’s say as profitable as I’d have thought it to be. Fortunately, I have built up a little empire of shops and income in the next village down the valley to get over the winter. My father was a military there. He came over for career reasons from the Jewish Autonomous Republic in the Far East. Well we Jews are at home here in the East now as anywhere in the world. I have 7 siblings. One is in Germany, some in America, one in Uzbekistan. It is as if we had secretly agreed to get interested in a different culture altogether every single one of us, marry there and be as happy or

unhappy as we only could. I have been quite unhappy in marriage, but that is over now. My husband has died and I am a free person. Oh, Martin, can you imagine how happy I am not to be married any more! People continue to make up good parties for me, new protection, all that. To be honest, my young friend, I am perfectly happy to live without a man. And I have my business to attend, I am not a house-wife type, oh no! I am not the one to sit in a corner and suffer, I can tell you!”

11. Ezen – Privet

The next day had a crystalline clear wind of sun-beams go through the freezing mountainous depths. I took the trail opposite from where we had arrived. My first lift was two hobby photographers who admitted rather ashamedly that they were in fact jobbing in a soulless fitness studio in Novosibirsk. They had a map, though. I chanced to take a quick look on it and I knew within moments what I was to do in the following 72 hours. Above the trail I had decided for a warning was written onto the map. “Do not go on this road without special off-road vehicles!” it read. My company had rather something of a normal off-road vehicle and would give in after a couple of kilometres already. There were clearly efforts to build a bridge over the riverbed, but for the time being, building work had just begun and there was no way around abandoning your vehicle however special you might think it to be to the abundant floods hoping for good luck and a lucky dive right through the trap. My colleagues resigned from that kind of sportsmanship. And my stripping and diving through the icy floods on bare feet would not in the least convince them to follow me. So I walked on alone,

wondering how many tougher off-road vehicles with tougher drivers there might be in this part of the world. For the time being, I could not see a trace of them.

Only if I know all my weaknesses within my little finger, I can shake hands and join fate with a revolutionary collective, I oracled to myself. Now is the moment to make the overall confession and sum it up to a trifle in view of the social task ahead, I declared with a loud voice. I was somehow convinced that nobody would hear me on this theatre practice.

Looking back, I quite missed my aim, thus exposing my cardinal weakness in practice where I wanted to get the theory of it. Protestant socialisation has it that you are to confess to yourself before you become ready to join in communion with the movement. I had a serious invitation downhill. It was not enough to engage in endless marvelling about the dark eyes of comrade Larissa. This was, speaking strictly from a dialectically materialist point of view (DMPV) missing the point to say it plainly. Confession was on the agenda. But halas, instead of analysing my defaults, I went about grabbing my selective memories for excuses and pretexts. Instead of condemning myself, I started analysing and condemning the material forces which had made me so deficient a soldier for the great cause. From the point of view of Protestant socialisation, this was rebellious non-sense and not apt to interest the almighty corporation for granting redemption. Well, Protestants are not bad in marketing, so they are silent about hell, whereas my Polish working/class colleagues have suffered tyrannical visions of hell and punishment in childhood from their parochial Catholic torturers, while the leftist branch of the free world was

praying for the Victory of Solidarność. Compared with Catholic confession to a fatty priest, the Protestant ritual looks almost as a mental exercise. During the 1991 Iran bombardment, I went to a priest genuinely enveloped in a bag of obesity, routinely hosting confessors in Nôtre Dame chapel. Pretending to be a Catholic who has run away from military service, I urged him to put me up for the night and save me from my prosecutors of the military police. "Go and give yourself in to the police searching for you", the clergyman replied unmoved. "It is your Christian duty to obey the laws." "But they will order me to kill", I cried in false despair. "It is your Christian duty to obey the law," he repeated and dismissed me. At that time, I had the intuition that a German clergyman would have been slightly more clever and would have included the historic case of German Fascism in his argument. And indeed, in spring 1999 Antje Vollmer, a Protestant priest handed over to the service of German expansionism in the ranks of the olive-green party would follow her leader Joseph Fischer and declare it our utmost duty to bomb Belgrade with German missiles for a third time in the 20th century. This time it was to end the occasional repetition of "Holocaust in Kosovo" discovered by some Western media. Their poor pretexts from the ground were falsified and contradicted even Western military intelligence of these days as it turned out later in investigation conducted by the European council. Hence, there is some reason to mistrust priests on the whole line. How attractive therefore to be able to confess to yourself (though it will not win you a free bed in Paris, even if you are successful).

I walked up-hill half-consciously humming Schubert's Winterreise: "I have to go that road which nobody ever came back!" It is a long time ago that I got infested with

Winterreise. I was in Spain then on the farm of Nine, my colleague in rage against bourgeois adoration of us travelling types. When calling someone back in Central Europe, I would speak just enough to make them listen attentively to the songs of Schubert. This could go on for hours. Telephone is cheap in the West. When I left a town in those times, I was sure to sing the crow song and when I found a place to sleep, it was almost obligatory to sing, imitating a slightly romantic and intrinsically ridiculous bass “in einer Koehlers simplen Huett’ hab’ Obdach ich gefunden. Doch meine Glieder ruh’n nicht aus so brennen ihre Wunden...” This can get quite obsessive if it does continue for months as in my case. Actually it was fiddling and presumably learning Chinese which cured me from the truly comic tragedism of Winterreise. But I was not diving into the same river once again now up on the Altaj Plateau. It was not about music at all now. I was recalling the death of my grandmother suddenly and I had long hours in the mountain solitude to contemplate my recollections.

I was returning from work in Rome to Warsaw then, in March 2005. Everything was snow beyond Florence. The olive trees on the slopes around Bologna had their branches heading heavily to the earth under loads of white. I stopped for ages in Vienna. I remember these Fascist bunkers standing with obnoxious brutality in the middle of parks and public spaces. “Nobody can get them away” my friend Eva from Vienna explained. I slept in a flat of some 200 square metres and ceilings some 4 metres above the floor. My host, Eva’s best friend, played the clarinet. We played in three together, Eva on her accordion and me on the trumpet with the assistance of a muffler. We could have continued to live like that, I suppose. I knew nothing. My grandmother was already in the morgue then.

But I went on to Warsaw. She opened the door for me and dealt out the news just as a welcome blow into my face, I had not yet put down the luggage. She watched me intensely. I am sorry for Catholically socialised people. They have such a neurotic, such an unconsidering relation to death. They want it all to be in keeping with their plastic flowers and their compulsory feelings in such cases. I did not cry then. And she would attack me bitterly. "I thought you had some rest of feeling left. Not for me, of course. But for the death of the most important woman in your life! I know that she was more important for you than your mother. And still, you do not even cry. You are an emotional corpse; there is nothing I can do with you any more." She did make love to me still. But later she claimed that she had not really meant that, not meant it for the past 8 years actually. "You are too fast. You see only yourself. You do not register my reaction. You have no real feeling. Your caressing is empty. After a while, it rather hurts." Secretly I believed her everything then.

A year afterwards, I interviewed the woman my comrades on the Ural railway lines would have certainly called my girl-friend on the topic. She said the exact opposite were true. Let us wait and see what she will tell when she knows a little better what exactly she is getting herself into in these nights on another part of that globe. What starts off easily in a tent can boil down to most conventionalist fixation and that would necessitate a guilty verdict for someone around here to be sure. In small details with her, there has already been much practice of such inversion.

Maybe my Polish companion for a decade was really a virtuosi in twisting things to their very opposite to match

an underground feeling of senselessness. For example, she would have a damned good intuition of what I sincerely intended to and then she could slap into my face her poignantly bitter proof that, in effect, I attained nothing but the exact opposite. I would e.g. try to pass over money I happened to have with the utmost occasionality I was capable of. She was jobless for 8 years. It was not her fault. It was the fault of Polish capitalism not letting her put her laborious conscience into such results which earn you market remuneration. She wrote a brilliant PhD instead. I read it with enthusiasm through a day and half a night. She herself would not read a page of my PhD. She would just warn me, "do not use me to write it". To be honest, she has done exactly that herself, used me to write hers and that was perfectly o.k. Once she had written it, she went out to search for one she loved and in the long run finally disposed of the comrade who had stepped into her flat on 10th of December 1996 quite unwilling to go in the following decade. Take the example of money. Little has been as painful as that. Once she had guessed my intention to transfer purchase power between us without making any fuss of it, she would brake down in tears, how I, a German intruder, could be so indelicate to expose her material dependence publicly.

German intrusion that is really a key motive of the decade. I guess my very German successor did not get quite the beating. I imagine it to be like the career of younger siblings. My brother hardly ever got a smack, whereas I went through a hell of a lot of beating by my mother. She would never admit it nowadays. I cannot help seeing parents who beat as a failing sort. For me this an early childhood experience and it continued to the age of 18. It got worst in the end, in 1988, when my mother had an affair with a

clergyman. I would get physical punishment even for returning late with the bicycle from my lover's home, 15 km north. Alas, it took some 3 hours to push the bike if the air had gone out of it again. I came late, yes. But I did not even have the guts to make love to her being quite conscious about a certain lack of talent then for making rubber products hold any pressure, as my truly dysfunctional bike clearly showed me. Well, that were the 1980s. We were all caught in a terrible ecomania. On the agricultural I went on later to learn everything for an organic commune, half of the students would get pregnant before passing the exam on "Agrartechnik". I passed that exam without a family background and on riding home to a little gypsy wagon in a cherry orchard I laughed from delight on the whole way from the beginning to the end. I was 22 years old and this had been the last exam of my life, I rejoiced. In the aftermath of this little success, I decided to engage in some compromises with technology for the sake of widening my horizons beyond academical knowledge.

On the first night I stayed at that place in Warsaw 1996, she would ask me to tell a joke in German language. "That's enough," she would cut me short after a while. "It really sounds just as in our films on German Fascists." I was shocked but took it as a legitimate observation. I did not want delicacy. Honesty was quite sufficient. 7 years later, I went to a working-class Cuban hairdresser collective before meeting a woman who had taken the liberty to kiss me in her place of work. The public hairdresser who got me took off everything I had on my head, surest way of keeping me out of the shop for some time. Afterwards, she stroke over my head with laughing admiration and said "Just as a little Nazi." I do not even think she meant that to be funny. It

was just a reverence to my origin, a shockingly neutral connotation a for Cuban youth. You can possibly imagine that the Baltic story does not really work there and telling people you are a Pole makes them shrink away from you with muted fear for Cubans rightly know Poles to be traitors to the cause of socialism. Even all the left friends I have in Poland have acted as traitors, if they were old enough to buy a kilo of bananas. In the Cuban case however where bananas grow in your back-yard, I rebelled with all my spirits and made a big scandal out of it. A woman living on the rubbles of the Warsaw ghetto has the right for more offensive remarks than a woman in the least anti-semitic country of the world, including Israel.

Ten years ago, my Polish companion did not know a word of German and she knew reasons not to change this. When we travelled through Germany on the quickest way possible to get to Paris she would feel feverish the entire length of the delicate transit because of the war. Nine years later, she could date with her new German lover without any translation help from my part. It was the peculiar idea of the later acquaintance, whom the comrades on the Ural railways would have surely called my girl-friend, to ask me to translate and edit her love letters to her new German bed mate. Hold on, these two guys even came from the same town, Hamburg, and worked in the same political spectrum, leftish Anarchism, they might call it. The repetitiveness of these developments, one after 10 years, one after 10 months of intense friendship does remind me of something I think to have learnt from experiencing the impact of a death. It sets forth learning processes which are really aloof from the usual self-commiseration and the common unmaterialistic appeals to make everything good again by the force of will and sympathy. The force of will

and sympathy has definite limits a materialist has to become familiar with. There is a lack of inventiveness, a blind heeding to material currents, in the case of love's labours lost e.g. socio-economic factors among others, there is the standard commodity blueprint of fostering and protecting your new acquisition on the emotional market. All of them combined can result in developments similar to the mode in which death sets definite limits. And there is nothing to be done against it and there is no reason, no sense to pressure against that. It does make sense to pressure against lots of other developments though. In this case, however, even your resistance may be just a preliminary version of the end. The end. I remember my mother talking to me on the phone, advising me how to do those 1200 km to come to her mother's funeral in time. She wanted me to be very quick and get the ritual conversation with the Protestant clergyman before the actual burial. I thought about a song which has had a certain fascination for me in autumn 1991. Its text by Tucholsky went very funny and realist: "When someone goes away, your interior starts to vibrate like a dimmer: now she's gone, what am I to do here, still? But no higher forces come for help, because by established custom the most stupid ideology has to do all the talking at a grave." I did not want to hear any of that talking and I knew why. Protestants always talk. They are the parrots of bourgeois consciousness and they accumulate spiritual capital by exploiting your readiness to listen. Maybe I became a materialist in the full sense of the word only when burying my grandmother. If my childish religiosity hanged already with a blue face, this event threw itself at its dangling feet and pulled it down with all its might. So it succeeded in definitely finishing up the earthly existence of the culprit. I do not conceal that in the first place all that hanging procedure was the exclusive doing of

Marxism put at work within me. My mother would actually be quite sorry hearing that. It would certainly remind her of a personal battle she fought alone in her class against reason and careerism alike in an East German school during the 1950s. She is definitely against the death penalty. I will not issue any statement on such a moralised question as long as world Capitalism still succeeds in starving some 50 000 of my comrades daily. In the conditions of the third world, comparing Cuba and its neighbouring countries, including Georgia and Florida, I learnt to actually appreciate the effects of red terror when nothing else seems to help keeping capitalists off our throats.

To be sure, there were two people at my grandmother's grave who wept terribly, my father and me. I know me to be liable to collapse facing any consequences of red terror in a very similar intensity. My mother, whom I remember as a tremendously powerful weeper in my early childhood would appear all relaxed and calm then. When the guests were leaving us at the end of the day, she would remark with this strange talent of hers to say the most inappropriate phrase in a given situation "I wonder who will be the next." My mother says that she has learnt how to cope with death and dying when being forced to raise us three children. I remember her lying in the kitchen in a genuine spasm of desperation. Our father was away as nearly always. He was actually terribly busy from the earliest times I can remember onwards, slowly and steadily building up his life project of merging work- and alcoholism. All the while my mother was forced to live in a situation comparable to wives under Spanish Fascism. Until today she has no bank account of her own. She would have literary no pay-for-work experience except for unremunerated and often humiliating auxiliary jobs created

by my father's devouring ambition at a breathless speed. Still today, she is able to come close to a nervous breakdown on discovering that I have used some card-board from her hand-printing shop or some red pigment. Even if she had granted a general permission earlier she would then find out that this was from a stock she had saved from her precious years of liberty when studying fine arts in the 1960s and that she disposed of literally no personal money to buy any replacement nowadays. All the while my father earns roughly 4 times the pay of a qualified industrial worker in the same village. It must have been around 1977. It was not about artistic materials then, but rather about time. She resolved in weeping with long and incredibly intense cries which made the whole house reverberate. Her body came to lay down in wild contractions on the kitchen floor, just before the entrance of a lousy and cold storage room the architecture of my father's hand had allowed at this place to facilitate domestic duties. This was actually her studio at that time, leaving roughly a square metre for her laborious paintings she worked on intensely for months. I say roughly a square meter but actually right into this free space the kitchen door was opening. Whenever one of us three kids would run to her, we would inevitably bump the metal door handle right into her spine. In order to have just a little distance to look at her work which was later to be exposed in first-hand galleries of the affluent republic my mother actually had to abandon her cell-like retreat of the size of a toilet and risk to go into the kitchen. This kitchen is notoriously tidy to the present day, no matter what bullshit any of us lousy bastards has been fabricating there. Actually, there could not be a better architectural composition for enslaving a professionally trained woman to idiotic house-work than this one. My father was writing a pompous dissertation at that time on the so-called

“hodological architectural space”, the space defined by the ways you have to walk. For this explorative book, he found the muse of combining Chinese philosophy and modern empirical studies, including even some conducted in the Soviet Union. Theoretically speaking, he might have been a leading expert at that time in defining social relations by making people live within his design of space and ways to walk. I have only once heard such crying again, it was in Ingmar Bergman’s film *Fanny and Alexander*. Her crying was officially about us three. It was not only that we made it impossible to her to go on painting as she wanted. She claimed more. “You bury me alive!” She cried at the edge of a female voice in the age of 35. Today having her age of that time myself, I understand that we were probably not that much guilty as maybe our father was. Maybe a good proportion of guilt in a materialist sense was even sucked up in the tremendous success of the left publishing house Kiepenheuer & Witsch of that time. Having studies in the Berlin of student revolt and doing occasional support work for comrades who had gone underground, my mother had all her enthusiasm and graphical skill set at work for illustrating at the service and mercy of that publishing trust flirting with a new and radical left. Alas, they would never pay a Pfennig for all my mother did. They were just a bunch of macho bastards pressing free resources out of a devolving movement.

But children are in a certain sense defenceless. I think this afternoon alone might have actually had the effect of a life-long anti-baby pill for the three of us. We seem to have the necessary physical drill and the nerve-racking discipline reaching right down into the most blissful moments of our lives. With a curious blockade which seems to be built into our very nervous constitution set down in early childhood

we can avoid in the course of decades what others risk on occasional hitch-hiking through the Carpathian Mountains.

Though counting 103 years now, altogether, neither my sister, nor my brother, nor me have ever succeeded in becoming really intimate with anyone who seriously wanted to provoke a child with us. Maybe we have not actively sought for such acquaintances. Who could tell? I prefer to judge some developments from their results.

Take my companionship of a Polish decade for example. Isn't it humiliating how you can create misery for each other? I positively assume that all these unfair treatments by her were just a faint reflection of what she has suffered from me. My later Ukrainian acquaintance, gifted with that little weakness to fall for anti-authoritarian behaving students, be them Ukrainians, Russians or Germans, would bluntly analyse that I had myself fallen into a hierarchy trap and submitted under the despotism of a woman against whom I could raise no prolonged criticism because of my complexes of historic guilt towards Polish people. Indeed as soon as my mother would hear of me kicking people in my childhood or anything of the like, she would conjure up that picture, monstrously realist as I found out later, of a German in uniform kicking Jews of the Warsaw ghetto into the trains to Treblinka. My Ukrainian acquaintance has indeed got a point there. But it is only a point, not the clue, not the key for doing any better.

Tyrannical behaviour is not alien to her. She has learned to span in her daughter for well-conceived emotional attacks of which she would easily admit a certain un-fairness a couple of days later when the battle's won. She lets her daughter work for herself. She has incredibly fatal fits of

jealousness, even damaging some of my essentially political friendships by chance, sort of collateral impact. And while doing such demolition work she can actually be just heading off with another bed mate.

There is such a lack of constructivism in the late reign of Capital! I was out for confession and catharsis and I have missed the trail and got right into the practical question: how can we possibly burn out class rule from the face of this earth? All the while, no matter where I get to by the chaotic convulsions of my memories, it is all about accumulation, materially, emotionally, destructively. Take the dearest memories available to me, e.g. Both, my later Polish and my later Ukrainian companion can be just as aggressive, especially when they know themselves that they are really playing false. Interestingly enough, no one of them ever expressed the wish, not even the dream, which could have been put under the reservation that it should not be fulfilled, of risking a child with me. Though I still believe and I told them on every appropriate and inappropriate occasion that with an utmost and combined effort you can bring up a new generation in a constructivist spirit, getting beyond the neurotic ambition to accumulate on your own genetic principles. The answer has been uniform, like a consistent echo from a cry of 1977: "Not now! Not to this world! Not with this one!" In 1977 I got early training to accept this. I can really understand them. I did never insist on our disagreement to mean anything for us. And all the while through my seemingly perfect understanding it hurts, terribly, like those prolonged cries of 1977 did hurt terribly and do not disappear from my daily doings. And this peculiar pain is quite likely to accompany us three siblings to our graves with first two, then one, then none to throw some earth and flowers.

Though, empirically speaking, childmaking is not fun to watch either, in most cases. I have heard of terribly few cases where the driving force was not fatal male machismo, paranoiac conservatism, outright resignation due to more or less joyless lovemaking or helpless deference to outside expectations. Children seem to come out primarily from neurotic, ritualisingly dead and anti-modern sexual relations as far as I can see. Bad luck for the children, I would say in the first place. Socialist revolution mobilises a vast process of public adoption.

Walking uphill, I was suddenly being shaken by warm and ringing laughter. What was this? An insect or a tiny bird? Something very big. It would start up from the mountain grass as a giant black locust and then spread a set of additional wings of scarlet red colour to go down in a terribly theatrical rattle. It was an Asian devil of the upland steps, a caprice of nature to be sure. Where did it get the energy from, to perform such scenic mastery in this meagre climate where basically nobody would watch? Nobody? Can we ever understand anything so simple? I had literary to sit down to laugh. This was the only adequate answer to my reflections. I will not undo my childhood; I will not retrieve love's labours lost. But I can laugh about a beast summing it all up in one hilarious jump, and furthermore I can through a Molotov cocktail in the right moment, demolish a police car and run out of a wedding ceremony when I feel the water close around my throat. It must have been an insect really. I saw two or three more. Sometimes I lie sleepless at night and I ask myself in a very general sense: what does my party, a party as defined in the Communist Manifesto, what does it really want me to do during the remaining time of my life? Well, supposedly I then got the

mission to promote shamanism; I would make very broad use of the Altaj scarlet locust.

We had already thrown flowers and earth onto the grave and I was shaken by unbearable fits of weeping, just as my father, when I happened to become subject to a coinciding outside attack. This one as well was inspired by Roman-Catholic socialisation. It did not feel exactly a fortunate week then, I can tell you. History does indeed seem to happen as a tragedy and repeat itself even somehow more painfully in the form of a farce as the moth-bitten uncle Marx in exile rightly observed. Now it was my childhood neighbour and Catholic elementary schoolmistress Frau Hillmann who descended on me with veritably biblical fervour. Funnily though, she could not really accuse me for not weeping, as the counterpart linked to her by the holy communion and another couple of cardinal performances. The Polish victim, though philosophically as much an atheist as I can claim to be one already, had descended on my not weeping with some legitimacy three days before. To the contrary, maybe the overweighty and retired schoolmistress attacked me right for weeping, who knows. She fished me out of the protection of the crowd, dragged me apart to face the melting snow and started to agitate me with the voice of a Trotskyite or a Japanese spy “Your grandmother has given you so much! Do not forget that. Do not forget that! Martin! Listen to me! Do not forget her!” I should have been economical with words that afternoon to simply shut her up with the unpretentious word “no”. Instead, basically I did hardly notice her and would actually not react to her at all. I was very busy these minutes, not as it might have appeared to some bystanders busy with weeping, that can be left perfectly to the eyes and the adjacent respiratory system, but to the contrary: busy

with thinking. As I can tell in retrospective, I was making up bold and graciously open plans for the whole rest of my life in precisely that moment. I had not the slightest fraction of rational capacity left over to behave towards Frau Hillmann, that is for sure. My rationality was all at work under these immensely effective protective covers of sobs and convulsive physical grief. I actively expanded my materialist concept of life and death with every breath I took and gave away. I soberly assessed the forces which were still in my body, and made up somehow joyously how I wanted to use them for a sensually opulent and politically revolutionary life before everything would inevitably and without any comfort recede into meaninglessness.

Following the winding traces east, I had now gained considerable height and passed a mountain range. This allowed me to oversee a high plateau of fulminate extension. Different tones of green were intermingling and playing changingly into the yellowish heights beyond the reach of trees. Snow-covered tops were showing up in the farthest southwest and I could not help imagining them as the veritable, physically impassable frontier to China, the promised land. Maybe I had really come in sight by now to where the outposts of four republics meet on eternal ice: Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan and the destination of my long, long journey on this splendid top of the earth, Kitaj.

12. harvesting stones and taking them home

At this moment a huge soviet lorry came to an abrupt and honking halt just behind me. An Altaj woman addressed me impatiently. "Are you going far?" Until today, I cannot

possibly guess what she asked it for. Would she not take me if I actually wanted to go too far or would she only take me for heading very far? I instantly grasped the need to utter an answer so vague that either way round, it could not possibly cause her to go without me. I hastily jumped on the big open rear. After a jump 10 metres downhill I had understood that I would simply break my bones from the impacts of the vehicle if I had continued to remain in a sitting position. I had expected a stern drive, but this was nothing of the like, it was plainly a hellish enterprise. They were going down on an open meadow with more than 60 km an hour. Two young Altaj farmhands sharing the rear with me showed me how to cling to a wooden board and compensate being thrown up with perfectly elastic legs when crashing down. I told to myself that the earth was moving very fast anyway every second and that this was just another vector and that anyway only burgers believe that the world stands still for their comfort. But it was terribly cold in the velocity. I would have loved to put on a scarf but there was no free second to do that. You had to cling to the board, the only life insurance available under present market conditions. Underneath us, 4 tons of steel were working with gigantic flexions and torsions making the metal roar and squeak to the extreme. I started to understand the landscape, the hills mountains, sudden falls and sharp risings as actually flying towards us, not the other way round, that helped a little. The following hour I saw possibly the most dramatic mountain scenery in all my life but it felt like a gramophone disc being played some 5 times too fast. Mountains of 3000 meter and more flew past, giant breaks lead half a thousand metres down and I could imagine us overturning and going strait down without considerably taking on speed in the almost free fall. There was a lake down in those valleys and I had a quarter

of a second to plunge my intensified imagination right into it, put up a tent on its shore, invite Eva, draw the gentle midday waves against the mountain summer light. And on we honked with relentless acceleration.

Suddenly, however, there was an old Altaj woman walking on the middle of the trail in the middle of nowhere. The truck came to a sudden halt a metre before her and now we had all the time of the world for a lengthy chat. The walking woman was dressed in traditional Asian clothing and I felt a reverence for her calm expression and gestures which I had probably internalised on working with Malayan rice farmers in Madagascar 14 years ago and started to comprehend on speaking to Asian peasants in Burma for the first time back in 1987 on returning from Australia. Our lorry was to load hay from a site 30 km away, I leaned. The old woman was coming from a hayfield as well. Everything turned around agriculture. The short summer is a succession of long, long workdays.

The principle of our hellish speed was a rational, agricultural work routine as well. Once you start to slow down on such a bumpy track as a four wheel drive equipped, well-fed, well-reposed tourist tends to do, you really enter the holes with the full physical might of tons of steel falling down and being hit up again, painfully for your body and actually devastating for the metal hardware around it. In the end, going slowly would be quite worse for both, truck and driver, actually. So the hellish acceleration of Altaj trucks, their trajectory flight over endless, nauseating successions of holes, interrupted only by occasional breathtaking touchdowns on the amortisation is nothing but a direct translation of the horseback experience, a technique dating back thousands of years.

Continual journeying through this part of the world, which seems closer to the moon actually, can only be had at the price of stabilising a mobile and most chaotic falling dynamic consisting of nothing else but constant collisions to be rescued and supported. In a very broad sense, socially, economically, politically, emotionally, this is the mode of truly revolutionary travelling you evolve towards when seriously taking up the task. The Altaj riders and their modern truck-based followers have found a perfectly rational and self-contained clue for dynamic stability and it was not only a thousand years ago that their superb mastery could afford to go for a reconquest of bloody old Europe.

Some kilometres down though, the journey came to an abrupt halt again. No chatting through the open drivers window, now. It was my turn. "You go down here, we drive up there, be careful!" and they were off uphill in a rolling cloud of dust. Go down to the riverside, was actually the adequate expression. There was a gigantic river a kilometre away, but the way towards it had a more important vertical component than a horizontal one. Actually there was nothing in the least horizontal before my senses, it was all a scenery of giant masses of stones and rocks and gravel in the very process of falling down similar to a waterfall. Back in the cute German hills I have an old friend from school, Dirk. During the 1980s, we developed an art of excursionism and exploring outdoors which could stretch over summer weeks on end. After half a decade of studying geology, he would tell me with glowing spirits about his growing ability to have a feeling for time. When looking at a landscape, he reported, he could by then literary feel the mountains move, condensing their evolution over hundreds of millions of years in his professionally trained perception. "Water is the one and

everything”, he would resume his stupor of apprehension to my amateur ignorance when we were standing in front of any landscape representing a thrill to him. “Leaving aside volcanic activity, the majority of mountains we know could only built by water under water, calm water. Their layers might rise up later from tectonic pressure. But once the substance gets above sea level it is subject to a continual destruction. This destruction is again the work of water, dynamic water.” I could not help to use his instructions for the most dilettante analogies. In the beginning, I was even a bit ashamed of what I made of his wisdom. However, later I learned that he had given up geology and working outdoors altogether for a lousy job-agency retraining scheme making him a Microsoft system administrator, i.e. learning practically nothing in a year’s course and being granted the right to promote Microsoft products in return. So now, I am more confident to use his ingenious insight, exporting Marx and Darwin into the realm of stones, to try a linkish reimport. Take the Soviet Union experience for example. The pressure of a World War butchery had made it rise above the marazm of Capitalist suffocation, a large and rough formation comprising one sixths of everything man can inhabit. Tectonically speaking, this result of a tragic collision was a direly instable but nonetheless giant island. The only one at its time. It has had two predecessors in time, the Owenite communes in the first half of the 19th century and the Paris commune, a tiny and fascinating atoll of tropical splendour provoked by the long-term aftermath of the social volcanism the French revolution had set free. But we agreed to leave volcanism aside. We have to leave something out of our metaphor to be retain the potential for surprise in our minds. Let us keep to the continent of the Soviet Union then, a structure in permanent collapse from the first day onward, yet still above sea level for the

time being. Yes, I know that there were giant rivers and giant lakes included in this formation, even inner seas right in its centre. But to the difference of bourgeois mainstream historiography I do not take that as a proof that land above sea has in fact never existed on the face of the earth.

To the contrary, the one and only giant island soon got two little-known Sputniks in its first years of tormenting rains. One was the Socialist Republic of Mongolia. The Third one is my personal favourite to smash even the bourgeois encyclopaedism of the BBC show “Brain of Britain”: it was the Socialist Republic of Tuva, Soviet Tibet as it is called among initiated Siberians. There are not many of them still alive, to be sure. This land on the face of the terribly ultramarine earth was accessible only once in a year. A late pseudo-Tsarist dictator of the revolutionary civil war had flown into this mousetrap and put up his orthodox reign there. But the tectonic pressure of class conflict in this part of the world was just too high. His repressive terror was useless, Tuva had to come out of the water! Altaj people, their immediate neighbours tell of a last effort by the white officers to hide their heritage in gold, weapons and paper documents. There must indeed have been a considerable rest of the immeasurable stuff they had inherited or ripped of the dying body of tsarist rule. In the freezing cold, they are said to have got the load up to a mountain peak of exceptional height. They would then take to their common practice of expropriating live-saving sheep kept by locals for surviving the winter cataclysms of the region. Ripping apart the precious animals, they would hold the carcasses to the chilling cliff piling up inaccessibly human feet above their position. Within minutes, the corpses froze to the stone and allowed the desperate rest of a dying army to advance one step further towards a legendary secret cave.

This cave finally served as a burial site for both, the tsarist fortune and its carriers. Spring came, the frozen corpses of the sheep fell down. Were they collected by locals who had survived the white terror or were just their bones taken away years later? We do not know. This makes it considerably difficult for a contemporary army of fanatics to localise the site. But they are out there, winter and summer, trying to get to the last trace of a dying empire. With a truly submarine interest, they want to reconstitute the submarine heritage of the roof of Asia. But the Republic of Tuva moved out of the waters with glory and by herself. And it became a fully independent ally of the great Soviet Union. Though quite aloof from ocean tempests at first sight, it shared some of the most tragic giant storms, giant rainfall and floodwater originating from the faraway seascapes which had remained on the earth. Tuva was in fact the only Socialist country in the world between 1920 and 1944 not having to share a border with a capitalist predator state. Nevertheless, the little country put incredible efforts into supporting its two Socialist sister countries in the Great War of the East. The state of Socialist Tuva delivered cattle and horses, sheep and butter to the Japanese front of World War II. It was a loyal member in the Socialist triangle alliance actively guarding the centre of Asia from the fascist nightmare. Only at the end of World War II it finally merged with the Soviet Union in one of those short moments in the year when the country was temporarily accessible to people from the outside world.

In that very moment, I was standing in front of exactly that giant Mountain Range forming the border to the Autonomous Republic of Tuva, as it is called today. There was snow on the upper parts of the enormous massifs sticking into the dark, dark blue sky. Deep, deep down at

the expansive feet of that enormous mountain range, a violent, broad Asian river was groaning with a load of noisily clicking rocks it slowly carried downwards, towards the eternal ice of the polar ocean.

Such movement had ground down the Soviet Union, I marvelled disbelieving at my own imagery. Inner contradictions you could say, yet unimaginable without the distant works of oceans laboriously active for the benefit of the destruction of everything solid that dares to stick out of their floods. Surely, they allow little leftish beasts to swim around in their depth, dreaming about mountains in the sun, rice paddies and horse-riding. They are harmless and quite entertaining idiots as long as they are content with themselves and do not mess around with the tectonic forces of real social unrest. However in a world totally submerged since 1991, we still know the very destructive forces of water to also be of use for our cause. Under the level of the sea, the forces of evil cannot avoid to pile up layer upon layer, develop formations of bizarre architecture and monstrous gravity which will eventually, when time is finally ripe, poke out of the terror of the sea and make up new formations, sets of entirely novel continents, speculative fish can only marvel at. Still today, there are underwater islands hilariously close to a coming out, Southern Mexico for example and some parts of Venezuela. Cuba is so closely under sea level that we are easily lead to believe it were a similar case. But after two rather suffocating winters there, I feel that it is rather caught in a move geologically downwards if no tectonic pressure from around helps it up again. Maybe Cuba didn't drop at all, geologically speaking. But the sea level is rising dramatically these years and this might account for major arts of the loss. t Though, some forms of live from the times Cuba once

enjoyed lavishing above sea level can still be detected within its shallow reefs. And there is the one fifth of India under Mescalite control and there are breathtaking upward tendencies in Nepal, Argentina, Bolivia. Well, to give a real tectonical assessment of our underwater world today, a lot more travelling would be necessary, a task for a global collective, not for a lonely wanderer around the Republic of Tuva. Though, every now and then he was caught in fits of jolly laughter: on meeting scarletly exploding Altaj mountain locusts.

-“Just imagine how close I had come by now. Falling down these slopes, I would have almost touched it with my knees!”

-“What are you talking about?”

-“Siberian Atlantis, of course. Just a shift in the tectonics of social conflict and it will be up again to stand the fight!”

13. immensely agitated water slowing down

“Things are happening here, Martin, and we do not know what to think about them,” four Altaj workers hiding in the shadow of a giant black cliff reported mysteriously. I had discovered them in a side valley because of their big truck. I had been following the river for 30 hours without the slightest sign of any vehicle transport. I had observed an Eagle from above, hunting for mice. I had thought a lot about my friend Udo. But now I was all anxious to relate with my potential saviours from this Tuva expedition into immeasurable solitude.

-“What are you talking about?” I asked, having a look behind my back just in case it was approaching. People

having enjoyed a live-long training in shamanist and semi-Buddhist practices could well keep on lying and drinking tea, while a bigger version of the scarlet locust was already setting foot on my rucksack. But no, if I was to believe them there was presumably something even more uncanny and still less real approaching, my comrades assured me. "We have seen signs in the sky and we have felt a monstrous trembling in the earth." I decided to be silent and wait for the initiation ceremony to continue. My questioning could only mislead the direction they were clearly heading to. However, they would not say a word either now. So we sat and drank tea silently in the boiling heat of the mountain step. We were sweating like little devils ourselves by this time. My comrades because they had collected a ton of stones and brought them down in linen sacks from a breathtakingly steep mountain slope, me because I had simply lent a hand to lift some of them up on their truck.

"You know Bajkonur?" One of the highland farmers inquired. "Yes, the cosmodrome, its in Kazakhstan though."

- "Listen, they shoot their rockets right over our heads into outer space. We see them disappear there." I was in a chatting mood and resolved to gesticulate if need be to make myself understood. Altaj people are said to have no historical religious contamination except for basic shamanism and the colonial imposition of some external orthodox rituals. I wanted to probe the limits of their tolerance for metaphysical speculation.

- "Maybe they follow Roerig, that Soviet artist's spiritual advice from the 1930s. He claimed that there are only two places on the earth allowing to get into the world above us: the Himalaya and the Altaj. The Chinese actually do the same."

"What?"

“They also follow the Soviet advices to launch their rockets into cosmic space. They even had a Tajkonaut out there lately. There might be Chinese producing game-boys on the moon soon.”

My colleagues were visibly not amused and feeling rather uneasy on hearing that. Altaj people are not comfortable about China. Presently, their doubts are focussing on a Russian road. Being projected without their say and already partly realised by Russian investment, it is to cut their republic in two to transcend the century-old deadlock between English and Russian Imperialism on the Altaj high plateau and build a new set of pipelines and communication facilities linking both sides.

“We have hold on to these mountains for thousands of years,” one gave way to their fears. “We are few and the Chinese are so many. They will just wipe us away.” I thought for a moment about the loveable Polish hysteric and painter Witkiewicz who, having fled successfully from the German invasion in 1939, committed suicide precisely because he feared to be overrun by Chinese in the end. Obviously the most powerful modern mysticism is to disguise social conflict as ethnical competition. Evidently, it was at work all over the submarine world. Curious what would sediment on top of this layer once all these Independent Republics of Kosovo and Montenegro at NATO’s mercy were let to go bankrupt.

-“So you really think the earthquakes are connected with Russian cosmonaut missions?”

-“Of course not directly,” my friends said rationally, “but with atom bomb testing for sure.” The last earthquake on the Altaj plateau was uncanny indeed. According to many observers, it reached an extraordinarily high level on the Richter scale for the region and caused almost no damage. The few losses were however serious because any aid

arriving in the aftermath was almost completely sucked up by the Republic's fraudulent political economics. In some valleys people still live in their banjas to the present day with their houses in rubbles according to local sources. Russians in the adjacent region say, that Altaj revendications for Russian rockets, throwing off cosmic waste on their heads, are just another hype produced by Republican lobby groups to smear the corrupted policies of the territory with possible fresh money for compensation. "Why did you charge only one ton of stones when the truck takes five easily" I tried to return our conversation to practical rationality. "My wife wants an oven. It is crazy anyway. We should all be down making hay. The weather is just right, it can only become worse. So we just take a ton and that's it. Furthermore," my new friend hesitated, "we do not think it good to take more from the mountains than what is necessary for us." I secretly bowed in respect. If Kiev had taken to this principle in the dirty hot spot of its urban luxuries, Chernobyl, there would probably be less cancer around the former Union nowadays. "This stone is very precious." My friends continued without me daring to interrupt them. "It is the property of the whole village. It would be inappropriate to take more than we need, say for selling it to a neighbour. This material retains an incredible amount of heat. Our village has been harvesting stones from here for generations. That is why there are so few suitable ones left to take home and we had to search the whole morning to get a ton together."

We got on the open truck and I hold on to the well-known board in front as fast as I could. Our speed was breath-taking to be sure but the road followed the riverbed now.

14. two words of German

In a poetic little wood with clear and bright water streaming over birch tree roots in sounds of laughter the motor stopped to work and the truck came to a long, long drawn out standstill. Everybody was prepared for this case. Petrol is not traded officially in these villages. It is a very scarce resource, similar to what awaits us in the West in a couple of decades. My colleagues had started with 15 litres, made 15 km up the mountains and 14 and a half downhill and that was it. There was no fuel available that afternoon, no tractor to pull the truck either, everyone was busily making hay. The young husband without a proper oven who had been organising the excursion with his friends was starting to get a bit cloudy in his face. I walked with him into the village. In spite of a little wooden hut with a Russian fairy-tale roof identifiable as an orthodox church everything actually reminded me of a Burmese settlement at the banks of a broad Asian low-land river. We went from wood house to wood house but there was no response. In the beginning, my driver still offered me to give me some bread. "Oh, no, I will better buy some in the village shop." I declared. He smiled occasionally. "Our shop sells as little bread as it sells fuel." Later, he forgot his offer. He was really getting very much concerned about not being out for haymaking. In this moment, I saw something very unexpected taking place in 100 metres distance. First a four wheel drive was passing the village downstream and then, I hardly believe my eyes, a Volga. To speak with the language of a rather primitive Orwell pamphlet, Volga is the car for the Soviet Pig class. How on earth did this car make it all these hundreds of kilometres through the wilderness surrounding the Republic of Tuva? I wondered. "They are gone, you won't

get them any more” my companion commented professionally. Nevertheless, I had a go and run after them stumbling into the most comic patches of knee-deep bogs within the village huts. This was my chance to hit the lake! This was what I had speculated for during 30 hours following the riverbed on my feet and now it was gone. I tried to wring some water and mud out of my trousers and met my former driver again, still on search for petrol. We were both not too lucky, today. I could perfectly understand his mood now and went away following the big river to my right downstream in a contemplative mood. That was it actually. I would not possibly be on time in Bijsk any more and Larissa would depart to their conspiratory camp site in the middle of the woods of the wide plains down the river without me. I had put camaraderie and friendship at risk for a badly-prepared little expedition towards the moon and now I had lost it. I went to the river-bank utterly subdued. The water was still flowing quite fast, though it was not strong enough any more to roll rocks with it. I through my rucksack to the left, stripped off my clothes and flung my body and my misery into the flood. My skin contracted immediately. That was about 7 degrees, I guessed. It did not need a lot of time to realise that this was not a travelling alternative to Bijsk. I got hold of a bit of grass on the shore luckily and walked back the running distance I had made with the water. “And now,” I started to declare with a loud voice, “we will have a look at Heraclitus and his teachings from a practical side. We will try to jump in the same river once again.” I suddenly had enormous fun with this exercise. Maybe I should have taken the U-turn which appeared unexpectedly in my life 2 years ago to become university teacher. My collisions with reality are of such a playful nature, that in the long run it needs something as crazy and far from

reality as German Academic Life to finance them, does it not? Well, won't probably like to jump in that greasy river once again, will I? And here I jumped a second time. The water was clear and cold as ice, I cried from joy and physical contraction. "Now," I declared after having gained ground under my feet again despite of the running flow of water. "I will walk throughout the night. I will not give in until I am not finally defeated." I had my clothes on in a few seconds and took back to the path almost running. Yet the hours were getting long on the trail and the sun was going down fast. There was no sight of any repletion of the Volga miracle. I greeted farmers on their meadows. Everything was getting fat and thick here, down in the valley. I felt like coming down towards Munich after days up on the Alps. The well-being of your body is embodied so perfectly in the big brown bodies of the affluent cows on affluent meadows. More than three third of the urgent mowing was actually done by hand. They were clearly fighting with time, now. Hand mowing should be done in the early morning, if I was to believe the accounts of Anna Karenina and my mother back in Europe. And indeed the weather did not support much confidence either. "Hellish work" the Agronom and son of peasants, my friend Aleksej would summarise the experience of 15 years of Russian private farming three days later. "Not a terrain, where you can make social experiments, actually, Martin. Maybe you should not put too much hope into an agricultural commune in these times in Russia." His words hit my head like a good old wine, Isaak Babel would say. How can you be so left an Agronomist and so realist a revolutionary at the same time? We have got a terrible lot to learn from you. We? Pampered children of the bloody colonial centres in modern history.

You got to the camp site of the left youth then? Yes, but not because of a Volga. There was a third truck, just at the end of the evening. It came back from throwing off a bunch of tourists somewhere in the periphery of Tuva and took me without asking any question. There was one possible direction: Teleckoe Lake and still a hell of a lot of kilometres to go. The driver and his female partner would go on very elaborate detours to find farmers out mowing and making arrangements with them for transports on the following day. One conversation took place over the full width of the river which was by now a stream of more than a hundred metres width. After this, we had to turn to reverse to the main path. But there was virtually no place to turn on the river shore. I really wondered whether we would be going back in reverse speed altogether. The driver accelerated impressively just to swing the driving wheel around and run our rear deep into the flowing icy waters. He then shifted gears, which took a little moment, in which I positively thought that we were now drifting and had lost ground completely. I remembered countless idiotic films on this issue and the immediate need to get out of the door in time. But we still touched ground and gained speed even within the water, enough to mount the slope of the beach and bounce back and along the trail downstream once again, heavily dripping though. We even picked up new hitch-hikers. A peasant made me retreat my “Baltic” story when he explained through the roaring noise of the motor that he had served 4 years of military service in Halle/Saale. That was exactly where I attempted to become a sound Socialist Agronomist following the winter of 1991. He could not tell anything about civil life though. He just remembered how they had freed Czechoslovakia from an enemy rebellion and returned home after the work being done. I could not imagine how to bridge the gap between

him and my friends in Prague. Somehow they were all sympathetic to me, and working class people all the like. Why would they look at one story from so different a side? Maybe I am theoretically just as weak as my pseudo-Maoist father and all this business of harmonising historic polarisations is not needed. I cannot tell. I will have to counter-check in Prague. Still, I did not know anything about the civil aspects of life in East Germany for an Altaj soldier. What did he actually do during all those 4 years except for pacifying Prague? Asking him directly yielded no result whatsoever. So I asked him what German words he could remember. That if anything would probably best characterise his intercourse with Eastern German civil life. Well, he actually knew two expressions in German. They had obviously brought him through life abroad just as necessary, he would reassure me. One was “let’s eat” and the other one was “let’s love”. He got off at the next meadow, carefully carrying a huge set of knives for his tractor, which he had repaired for further mowing in a little hamlet upstream.

15. reversing into running ice

In the last beams of a splendid sun, I was set off on the beach of Lake Teleckoe. I was ready to kiss the earth for my fortunate ride or do other more helpful things. But my drivers would refuse to take any money. I went over a gleaming meadow and saw some youth writing a graffiti onto a block house stable. “Got you, bloody hools!” I barked at them from behind and really, they went red in their faces. We laughed and became friends on the spot. Later they told me a fascinating story about the “break-

through”, the place, where my first truck had set me out. In the Brezhnev years, a single bulldozer driver was set to make the road down in a summer. He pushed gravel and drove a U-turn, pushed gravel and drove a U-turn and after some hundred U-turns he arrived down at the riverbed with right with the end of summer. So that is the story why I had managed to come down to Lake Teleckoe at all.

16. birch-trees of Siberian Bahamas

Zoologically speaking, parasites like me, drifting in these regions seem to follow gravity. Down at the shore, a lot of my sort seemed to have been swum in, suddenly. Actually the only road connection is more than a thousand kilometres away from the capital, taking you all around for a big big detour. You can come over the lake but that is almost a 100 km of boat ride as well. People take all this pain and they get a hut on the shore and then they do not know what to do with themselves and their heavily gained tranquillity. This situation is called muse and it is damned rare in Capitalism. So the whole of the situative shore population drifts into realms of intriguing Chekhovian boredom. That was balsam on the waves of my body and mind to be sure. I couldn't imagine a better way to wait for a ship back to Bijsk. Now, my fate was clearly not in my hands any more. I had arrived at the point where I could just let everything go as it wanted. It is a strange feeling to follow with a lazy glance all the excuses and imaginations which your mind and soul make up out of pure habit to run around like a stressed rabbit. In Cuba, I once had the illuminative intuition that we European visitors are physically addicted to political frustration. We just know everything to have gone wrong, wrong, wrong. It is obligatory to carry around political frustration in Europe. Then you arrive on the Island pointing to a better world and you can, if you are a careful and a honest observer, soon catch your assembled faculties in the operation of finding new pretexts to continue the old song. \It is actually funnier the longer you stay because you see the short-term visitors not changing sail to the different wind at all, they just fall from one line of criticism adopted in

western Europe into the same line of criticism for Eastern Cuba. They have of course ready-made theories on class-war, world and micro-economics, corruption and money, prostitution and their new comrades on the island. It is all hilariously improvised to supply them with the set of arguments they need to continue the old political understanding of work and failure. So what have I learnt within two years close to tropical Socialism? What have I learnt in 18 hours waiting at the Southern shore of Lake Teleckoe? I have not yet learnt to explain much more than any newcomers, but I do have learnt to ask some more questions than before. That is a nice little piece of progress.

There was a striking contrast between the unpretentiousness of the place tended by an Altaj-Russian working collective. Some wooden huts for a limited number of guests stood close to the shore. Wide open spaces save from the rain had been created using nothing else but wood. One of them was an Altaj pagoda, really closer to the Southern Chinese, than to the Russian meaning of the word. It was so musically placed on a hill among a sea of wild coastal birch-trees that none of the land-rover New-Russian guest killing their time before restarting their cars to return to Novosibirsk would ever set foot into them. They set foot into everything else, though. For me there was still a task before abandoning body and mind to perfectly helpless idleness waiting for a ship. I had to wash my brushes, they had been in use without cleaning from the Ural excursion onwards. Roughly speaking I had been painting an oil painting every day since then. However some of the less popular brushes had fallen out of use without me noticing it. Their bank of oil colour within not being refreshed, they were already painstakingly stiff. For me, brushes mean what the animals mean in the farm

behind the woods of the tales collected by Brother Grim. They are to be served first when settling down for a rest. No way to think about a treat for you if they have not got their due treat yet. I was quite desolate. I would wash for an hour with mild soap and cold water I had to pump up. I tried to warm the detergent under the work of my fingers. Well, I had failed for some of them, It looked. I had been proven a bad guest in the farmstead behind the woods. It was already getting dark when Irina stepped into the scene. Once in 2002, a communal panting festival of ours in Estonia was blasted up with incredibly sophisticated Russian intrigues and rivalry from a Byelorussian painter called Irina. I was warned to the utmost, though her sister was roughly double her age. There are some basic faculties in people, they are not apt to give up. There is Eva for example, will she ever give up the convenience of that hellish sexist idolatry her Ukrainian environment builds up around her little body of two and a half wherever she sets foot? How can she? The effects of spoiling with adoration are meant to stay and they do stay. "Listen carefully when they start to praise you, you might get out of it more stupid than you are likely to notice still yourself." This utterly Protestant prophecy by my mother is a guiding star just as if it came right over from Melbourne or Southampton. Another one to complete it is missing, we will get it unexpectedly in chapter 25.

"Brushes with old oil paint are to be washed with pure sunflower oilseed" Novosibirsk Irina said amiably, stepping before me out of the dark. And then she continued with a chattering frankness. "I put mine in a tin with sunflower oil." And admitted, "well it does not do them any good if they remain in there used for a very long time. I am Irina, by the way." This stout lady of about 50 held out her hand to shake mine. I had to take a little step back. She was

talking Russian and thus relating so freely as only very experienced women in the United States manage to, drawing from centuries of women's liberation movement, and well, and the pioneer experience I have tried to sketch in Heidelberg. For 20 years now, people have been watching me wash my brushes with a method, I taught to myself from an old German book and nobody would care to pass over anything more than a distant laugh about my efforts to keep the brushes save from the aggressive chemical impact of turpentine. And here, in the insinuatingly mild night wind under the birch-trees somebody came out of the dark to care as much for my labour as to tell me about hers. This was extraordinary. Irina offered some sunflower oil from her car. And this was definitely the point, a set of stupid responses by me began. They would continue throughout the night and into the next day. I have collected such a fluffy stock of addresses that I have to paint little portraits next to the name to be able to associate even so central new acquaintances as Larissa in the last months of travel. But somehow, I did not take the address of Irina. I am really cross with me for that failure. She definitely wanted to dance with me under the wide wooden roof on the sandy hill. I was taken aback again. But I was in dirty work suit clothes. Russian classism would normally rule out any intimacy with you. Once you walk around in a greasy work suite, you find out that their habitual xenophobia is nothing in comparison to their classism. They are really arrogant towards any working-class markers as only the superior class of shop-keepers in Naples or Polish middle-class on a church Sunday can be. Something like a European record, to be sure. "But, to the contrary" Irina answered with sovereign amusement. "Don't you know that today is the day of the building worker? It is my day as well, by the way, I am an Architect.

Promise me to come to the dance floor to join our little reception banquet as soon as you have put your brushes in order.” While she was disappearing, I wondered why I had been messing around with women under 40 at all in my life. Life seems so terribly short and it is close to criminal negligence to throw yourself into the arms of inexperience altogether. Or maybe this practical grip of the elder Irina is just a precious gift she received from Soviet socialisation. For men acquaintances in Russia, I have found out that the year of birth 1958 seems to be the last limit. Everybody born later has become a professional cynic before even maturing to an age of adulthood. Some of them never reach it. Socially, Russian men seem a failure in 90% of all cases I could ever come close to. It is utter success which provokes them to grow anti-social. I imagine it to be a monstrous set of dubious favours done to them, of the type my mother allowed to happen when not instructing me to wipe the floors I was using.

I got some oil from the kitchen. It was used frying oil mixed with new frying oil, probably rapeseed. It was a total failure. I had another hour to get it off again and would only finally succeed the other day with a clear and operative mind. I would then stumble into the banquette for our trade on the sandy hill among the birch trees, inertly wincing into myself because I had messed up my brushes, the tools of my working trip.

Of this banquette, I remember only one nice detail, that I risked a scandal and ate the fish from Irina’s plate which was much better than what they were giving us. The banquette was a show for Irina’s “brother”, really. A failed man, I am sure to say. In this case, I would clearly opt for regime change. He is a leading commander in the Novosibirsk police force and a self-made man of incredibly

gross manners. He is moneyed, though a state servant. He would openly praise himself for privatising all the efficient parts of the police's economical empire. He would direct all eyes of the reception's company to Irina and me crying at the top of his drunken voice "We want to see you dance, you two!" And some time later, he would remark with the characteristic unheeding brutality of his work-place "Will get less stiff, this German, once my sister caresses his dick, I suppose." I took that without so much as a smile. But I would imply him in a conversation at the top of our cultured voices, going diagonally through the company of the night. "I have picked some nice, juicy pieces of Marihuana up there in the mountains. How much will you give me for that, once you catch me in Novosibirsk?" He became astonishing factual despite of his drinking. "I will give you five years of prison if you only use it yourself." He retorted. "Whereas, in the case you sell it to others, you will get something up to 15." This was clearly sufficient. There was no joking about his being terribly jealous of Irina. I knew that he would be able to search my hut with his inferiors that same night. And being indeed too much of a German in this case as he had so insinuatingly remarked for quite another, I had told the truth and nothing but the truth about my exceptionally attractive harvest from the high Altaj. So now was the time to kiss Irina's experienced hands for a fare-well, get into running to my hut as soon as the dark of the birch-trees had firmly enveloped me and fish all the green branches out of my rucksack. They were so full of summer's heavy perfume as to incense the whole rucksack with a comforting and promising smell. It was a real pity to have betrayed them. I just hoped their analytics were too primitive to distil anything out of the cloth of the rucksack. Asking myself where to put it, I occasionally tried if my neighbouring hut, where Irina and her "brother" were

to sleep, was locked. It was not. I lifted up the red divan on their floor, in a faintly smiling moonlight breaking through their window. Everything was silent. This was a jolly good burial place for the precious green, I cheered myself up. Just imagine the headline tomorrow in Novosibirsk. "Head of municipal police forced discovered with unknown woman and 250 gram of pure Marihuana in an Altaj hut" I went to sleep. And as in 13000 and one previous nights of my life, nobody would delicately knock on my door, of course.

17. Honey, Honey, and another night awake

On the next morning familiarity and boredom among the company on the site reached veritably Chekhovian dimensions. I came to sit next to Irina on the long breakfast table. I told her that I had left her the night before to prevent her "brother" from cracking down on my hut with his employees. "I have a brother myself, Irina" I assured her. "I know that they can sometimes be terribly jealous and that would not have been in keeping with our "holiday of the building trades", would it." Irina answered calmly that I had been perfectly right and that brothers are sometimes just a jealous lot indeed.

The policeman now insisted on taking me on a boat tour, he would sponsor generously for his "sister". Hiring boats is incredibly expensive on that corner of Russia. I guessed what his sudden good-nature towards me was stemming from and thanked politely.

Maybe now, it was me who was a bit jealous after all. You might probably call it just a professional health risk if you have finished university some 12 years ago and you are actually still tramping around as an underperforming artist without a fixed place of abode.

I took my rucksack, still smelling with promising affluence lost. Someone had told me that I had to go straight north to find the place where a boat might come today or tomorrow. Well tomorrow was too late. Today was bingo, though. I went straight and came to the shore of the lake after 20 metres. I returned to ask a very young Altaj woman who had taken curious interest in my drawing the night before. She was actually the manager of the place and though not much more than a third of age in comparison to the stout, blonde architect getting on the boat now, she was a very reliable and settled personality. “You have to go through the water.” She said. I believed her everything, yet having arrived at my rucksack, I took care to strip of all my clothes, just in case the water would be a bit deep after the rain of the last weeks. I still did not know what I should head for. A little sand bank was some 40 metres out in the lake so I made my way straight. The first five steps got the icy water up to my stomach, the following five up to my ears and there was no halt in sight. Lake Teleckoe is up to almost 400 metres deep, I learnt later. There was no sense in taking my rucksack on such a walk over water. So I carefully put on some clothes so as not to offend the young Altaj manager and returned back to the reception. “I went straight and, believe me or not, the water was further up than my knees.” I would not quite like to admit to her to what extent I had actually trusted her words and that there was excessive water in my ears from her advice. She laughed as only Altaj people can laugh in Russia, with a soft

and melodious, utterly Asian delicacy, reminding your senses of the touch of a light feather. “No, not straight in the literal sense. Of course you follow the underwater bank taking the detour to the right.” I went back, saying good-bye to her for a third time but without any routine as I noticed with a subtle ring of uncomfortability. It was then, that I saw the motor boat paid for with manoeuvres of privatising the public police force of Novosibirsk swimming out of the bay in an elegant curve. It was then, that I understood that I had not taken Irina’s address. I had felt just too familiar with her to bother about anything of the sort. Well, here they went off. I regretted not to have been a bit more selfish and used the offer for a lift on the boat to get to this damned sand bank before me. It’s complete extensions were concealed by a set of bushes growing out of the lake. The water was higher than normal, that was for sure. I searched for traces and I found deep imprints of four-wheel car tires under the surface of the water. Indeed, these traces were taking a bold right curve towards the sand bank. I guess, I really came under water this time only because the car traces I followed were very deep. Apart from that, the trail got me over brilliantly. I obviously knew whom I could trust. The sand bank turned out to be a lengthy peninsula of half a kilometre. Wood bleached by months in the water was piling up on the beach. I was looking forward to a good fire to warm me through my waiting hours. I did not quite know which point of the peninsular was the one where boats would eventually hit it. But taking into account the steep slopes of several hundred, up to a thousand metres making up the shore of the lake and not allowing even an official foot pass to go along the major part of its hundreds of kilometres of shorelines, I judged that the place where the sandy peninsula stemmed off from this bold shoreline was probably the one with the deepest

water here where sediments from the broad river were piling up in the most incomprehensible forms. I could not tell why I felt so much alike to the days I hitch-hiked from Cuba to the US over the Bahamian islands. I had stolen a piece of extraordinary luxury with bare foot travelling that was for sure. I was appalled by the New/Russians bossing around the young and incredible Altaj manager of the place to serve them at the banquet as much as I was appalled by the moneyed tax-invaders gathering in this elect space from all over the world who would not even care about the homeless natives under their bridges. The natives were fed with Anglo-Saxon Christianity and an appalling lack of education as compared to the Cuban proletariat and that was obviously enough to keep them down in that tax-haven of painful affluence.

I had rebelled then, agitating people under the bridge, on night-shifts in the harbour. I had told them about Cuba and they were listening with interest. One post woman, a stout black Bahamian native asked me if I had heard about this dinosaur issue. Nobody had told her at school that it was actually a well-established fact of biological science. They would probably be very British and behave politically correct towards creationist fanatics of the various sects operating on the lack of proper education of the Isles. Yet, their understanding was vivid and fresh, they would be able to have hilariously educated discussions with any Afro-Cuban if they just let them have basic access to the weapons of bourgeois knowledge of the world. They would not. However, nearly everyone on the Bahamas would be able to tell what Cuba was. It was only in the United States on trying to agitate El Salvadorian illegal workers, that I came across adult minds who were not able to associate the word Cuba with anything. Well, that is US society, the most

classist educational management of the world. The post woman on the Bahamas had grasped the sting of the dinosaur story in the flesh of creationist sects all around her with such a vivid mind as the Altaj stone farmers had swallowed their rulers idle lobbying on Baikonur compensation money. “Dinosaurs, big, big creatures. Did God make them and not like them?” she would ask me in the dialectical clarity only Pidgin English can produce in this world, with her wide black eyes fully attentive, opened towards me. And then she would come to the very essence of Marxist methodology asking firmly “How can that be?” I tried my best to spur her asking. I did not quite succeed. Instead, she started to send love letters over to Europe which for the first time in my life, well not counting a flute player in Florence, make me go through that painful and hopeless feeling of deprivation I must have caused others without really knowing in sending them helpless love letters. I have been very careful with love letters since. They seem in a sense to block a process of coming to a better understanding of the world. And how can we possibly relate in a better way if we do not understand so much more than we do today?

18. cold, wide rivers

I did get the boat. I did get it in time. I did manage to cut the price half. I did get fabulous lifts down to Bijsk. I even got a bottle of fine honey to bring along. But I did not get to the comrade I had hoped to find.

Bijsk was all aloof, perfectly relaxed and lazy in a bath of disconcentrated summer evening air, something I did not quite associate with Siberia by now. During my days and

nights on the roof of Asia, my senses had opened up to her. I would be ready to listen to her not talking. I would have been ready for being silent altogether. I had nothing to say to her any more. There was a bit of reporting to be done, but I would get through that with a supreme sense of economics for words. My consciousness was ripe enough to just melt in her presence and heed to her. My faculty of observation had fortunately not yet melted alongside, so after watching whom I had met again for two minutes, I hastily put on a veritably childish drill to make myself appear a normal visitor who has come from a normal week-end trip to go to a normal little occasion to meet friends down near Barnaul. In the end, I did not need anything else, did I. After half an hour, I marvelled at my success. I had successfully taken the air out of everything. Even the honey I brought was nothing. They had just the same bottle of honey standing already on their kitchen table. They had been in the high Altaj as well. I was not surprised to learn that their honey was by far tastier than the one I had become so excited about. Larissa would not go to the allotment with me any more, so I went with her mother. This mother was a hilariously agile and jolly company. Within five minutes she had scanned my entire civil position in life. Married? No. Divorced? No. Children? None. None? None. Fixed plans? None. There was a little pause and into the void of the on-setting evening she sighed: "So, why do you make such a fuss?" I vaguely thought, she could mean us two and agreed tacitly.

In the night, she took me out with her for seeing off a best girl-friend of hers. A silent thunderstorm had set upon the summer town and my senses were all open to its radiating lightening and changes of air. We tacitly returned to the shelter of our half of the flat and I lay down in well-known

landscapes of raspberry-mountains. I was afraid to make any movement in the cushions, fearing to keep her awake, which would have been inappropriate. Her movements on the contrary would not let me sleep at all. This time, her mere breathing rhythm coming faintly through the open door from the adjacent room would not let me close an eye for a minute that night. I did not regret anything. I did not really want anything. Any faculty of commiseration was perfectly put at naught with all the others. I was bleeding silently with my senses all laid open and I was content with the standstill. I calmly waited for the tension of the night, this unbearable lightening and not thundering, to pass into oblivion. Oblivion, though, was never to be found. I stood up in the morning with a feeling of comic gratefulness. I had come through another night of my life. Sometimes this seems so terribly difficult, every step in time seems so unbearably to do at all that in the course, I positively doubt to make it to the end. However, I sincerely believe that actually dying would still feel quite different. It must be something in-between, then. But here I was and the morning light as well, we had made it against all odds. I had spent 6 hours without doing anything, when everything I could have done including all the possible consequences would have been much, much easier to support, I believed.

There was a little superficial satisfaction of the type Pushkin celebrates. In fact, in the course of a week, her father had not addressed me a single time, had not looked into my eyes and not even said a greeting. In a certain bourgeois sense this was a bit rude, actually. I knew my own father perfectly well enough to know that he could treat any visitor of my sister like that, disregarding her emotions altogether. This was most probably plain and hilariously unreflected jealousy and she did agree with my

guess. I had to address it anyway. I had to take the initiative and make a point of it, because I feared she might be tacitly sorry for it if we would not address it and secretly laugh about him together.

So we went off from home. Quite probably, I would never return in my life, but who knows? My muscles were feeling rather unfit to stick to their bones. Nerves were going painfully through this disco-ordinated lump of flesh shivering irritably from time to time. In German, we have a very funny expression for such a state, we call it “ein Haeufchen Elend” – a cute little lump of misery. In Barnaul, we took the river boat on the Ob. We went for ages on these wide, wide waters. It was freezing cold. I leant alternately on her laps and on her shoulders with my will falling very low under the throbbing progression of exhaustion. I think it was not only a bliss for me to get a little warmth from the closeness of another body. There was a climatic need for a certain degree of intimacy and as every materialistically founded argument, she would heed to it without exchanging unnecessary words on the topic. How amazing that there are 72 hours of rest ahead, I said to my self secretly with the feeling of guilt, that this was politically quite incorrect. But the prospect of not having to change place and drag your luggage for four days and three nights on end was just too attractive after my Marathon over 3000 km of Siberia. For two weeks now, from Lena’s place in Moscow onwards, actually, there had not be a single night’s rest at the same place where I had been resting the night before. I was getting positively out of my senses with an over-dose of Roma essence. Judging from the rain and the weather forecast, I knew that the whole camp would probably swim in mud and water. I expected it to have poor meals and loud nights and in spite of

everything, I approached it like an undeserved four star accommodation. Personally, I did not need a glimpse of politics to make it attractive to me. I was just content with the chance, not to move physically, and, well, and be somehow close, in a measurable numbers of metres, close to her. Half-sleeping on her sisterly shoulder it was now standing clear before my eyes that we were heading for genuine collision if I did not succeed to knock my bodily affection for her out by myself in the very first round. As it turned out, she would assist me perfectly in this task. It felt a bit dump inside afterwards but the culprit was indeed lying knocked off on the floor and my interest in political discussion and analysis could take his place with an air of not knowing what had been done in the first row to let her have it all, centre-stage and the cheers of the audience.

Only during one night, after being allowed a very, very nice dance and refused the following, the one knocked off so cleverly by the combined effort of the two of us stood up to a kind of zombie existence and wandered through the grey spaces of the empty darkness, an eye-sore to look at and to listen to, I guess. With a certain formal good-heartedness, she would then offer me to go for a walk together and speak, "if it is really that bad." This was all done publicly in the attentive space of a tent with her and three other comrades who could put their own and not in the least negligible affection for Larissa in a much more becoming and chevalresque wording than I could. On Zauberberg, they had at least some pulomaria to excuse the visible effects of a Russian aristocrat, I joked to myself. And I remembered a rather brutal invention out of a recent Dostoevsky performance put on a bombastic scene in a truly Wagnerian spirit of Russomania by Hans Castorp in the Volksbuehne am Rosa Luxemburg-Platz where a none

the less black-eyed Russian actress utters the raging war-cry “7 German pigs against the Russian beauty!” I was not amused by my acute feeling of sea-sickness and thought it would indeed not be explainable if I started vomiting right inside of the tent. I felt the collective waiting for my answer. Would I take the hand stretched out in comradeship with a feeling not matching her nobility? Yes, I would. So I said “I do not want to get on peoples nerves here.” That would have been the perfect occasion for her to retort merrily, that I did not get on their nerves at all, that I was a stranger yes, but they could excuse my inappropriate emotionality as the unfortunate but excusable result of not having gone through the strict school of Russian comradeship. She could have said something of that sort, or something more socialisable or something less socialisable or a joke reflecting the absurdity of the position I had manoeuvred myself in on the wide and cold waters of the Ob.

But actually, she deliberately chose to say nothing at all. I was quite at the end of my wit. My socialisation has not equipped me with the practical knowledge how to get through a Siberian winter. It simply makes me go cold. I listened into the half-hour of silence spanning through the dead of the night with growing concern. So every word I had said in baroquely polemical intention was just right, my principally joyous affection for my comrade, ready to step back just on command, was actually a nuisance for the collective. Not even my male neighbours would come to rescue me, let’s say for keeping up appearances.

Appearances in general are not really an issue in Russian commons of a proletarian making. Instead, my male fellow-sleepers would be so delicate as not to mingle in the tacit test of forces between me and her. They would not even more than just giggle jollily to themselves. I dragged myself

out of the tent in the end, carried myself to the next bush where I sincerely hoped to be far enough away from any waking ear. I felt perfectly like vomiting still, but I discovered, that I had only tears to loose. The convulsions of my body however were quite comparable. Finally, a sensation of the cold of the night and a certain realist stupor would take over in my body again. When I came back to the tent, she would be awake. “Why don’t you sleep?” She asked with a definitely reproachful air now. “Love”, I said defencelessly. “What?” she inquired with some disbelief and a little ring of revulsion in her voice, subdued to allow those who slept not to witness this. “Love. What do you think?” I repeated and hated myself for having taken resort to a worthless piece of conventional kitsch. But I was truly tired of it by then. Again there was no answer and I would not even wait any more.

A rather sarcastic answer reached me next morning. We were truly bathing in floods of cold water by that time, which poured down in never ending cascades from a darkish grey sky. The amount of rain would finally promote a certain sense of humour within my spirits, as I was not sorry to observe.

Again, women would take to the dishes and the male comrades to the birch-tree firewood, the only one burning under rain, the one and only consolation in Russia’s seemingly never-ending misery. So I would again rebel against gender division of work and challenge. Larissa, who was facilitating a lot of these works, was visibly and generally tired of me by then and conceded after a discussion: “All right, you will dry the dishes with the girls.” Drying is “*poloskat*” (thanks Shirley for the language proofreading). In Polish this means becoming physically

intimate. I did not know what I was doing in Russian language, but that is just the way you move around in a foreign system of connotations. “I have no objection at all, to engage in drying with the girls,” I retorted with a complicating, probably a little old-fashioned grammatical construction, which I almost surely got wrong. On her going away, I heard a sarcastic sigh of hers. It was a bit in the mode of her mother but not quite as sympathetic. “I do have noticed that, I can tell you!” it went. We were over with it all, then. We were ready for engaging in politics.

19. rebels ready for the countryside?

I remember watching the faces and limbs, the eclectic pieces of uniforms from the Columbian FARC-EP to ordinary US-army store outlets. I remember hearing the voices go round in this collective of 30. I remember the first smiles and laughter I managed to register. I remember watching some girls taking apart an automatic riffle and potting it back in form within seconds. It was all very new for me, who had gone through a hell of a lot of Christian singing and bourgeois pacifism at that age, but knew Marxism-Leninism exclusively from history-books and much-admired Kurdish radicals hibernating in the bloody provincial town I had to go to school to in Western Germany.

I heard them talk about other youth movements, some of them were present in the camp and it sounded quite sensible. They made no compromise with fascists, chauvinists or related patriots of any kind, though they were sometimes using the word “patriotic” in a sense you could never clarify to the left of Western Europe. They had

sober but amiable criticism for Trotskyite techniques and felt most closed to Anarchists actually. I reckon the biggest problem on the Russian left is not Anarchophobia, but that most Russian Anarchists are everything but left. They are in general kids of the middle-classes with hilariously consumerist expectations towards life. All the while, they would think it too direct a way to follow their parents and become liberal right away, so they become libertarian for the interval until starting to build middle-class families themselves. These interesting rebels against conventions are the closest allies of Russian Communists. For Russian Communists have a potent and powerful enemy. One of their most suffocating enemies is a monstrous system of command and control, a marazm of petty-bourgeois mediocrity and greasy, opportunistic loyalty to the army, to Russian capital, to the Putin dictatorship. I am talking of course about the Communist Party itself.

I had come to the main fraction numbers of communist youth active in Russia today. In the terms of correct fractionology they must be called Zyuganov-partition. I was now comfortable to learn that they were actually among the most active anti- Zyuganovists active in the country. Those of them having formal function and income inside the revolting party body are organised informally, well linked and communicating throughout the year to give life to an inner-party opposition. This opposition inside of the Communist party is lively, theoretically sophisticated, willing to discuss with more consistent anti-party positions and taking part in the alterglobalist movement of Europe actively ignoring party orders and even counter-acting them. I listened to a wide variety of inside horror stories about the bourgeoisisation of their Communist party. During our last night together, when I voiced the malignant prophecy

that the day could be close, when class war made it necessary, as Mao had put it, to “bomb our own party headquarter”, they agreed with a noticeably long-standing wrath. They are professionals is as much as to professionally subdue their intense anger for the time being to be able to counter-function within the apparatus, but it really seems ready to be mobilised for a final division when time is ripe. There is one even more serious political enemy in the country: the Putin administration and its incomplete alliance with national capital. My comrades vary in their analysis of the dynamics this capital can develop. You can say that those working closer to the centre in Moscow tend to see the possibility of an orange revolution show being sponsored jointly with the West for the 2008 elections as we have witnessed in Ukraine 2004 and Byelorussia 2006, the consequences of which can be summed up as a tragedy in the first case and a farce in the second. Russian capital could go for full neo-liberalism and sell-out of the remaining national resources in this scenario. The present dictator would then be backed up by a dubious so-called “Eurasian” movement which promotes the primitivistic Putinist plot that everything is bad in Russia, but the tsar is good. People based in the Lower Altaj region would say that Russian capital is not independent enough to mount an orange opposition. According to the sources closer to Moscow however, there could actually be a show down. “Come to Russia in 2008,” they would say, “There will be pompous mobilisation for blue and orange leadership. There might be some unexpected change in that.” In the next sentence, they would point out, however, that the Communist party will be most loyally and most boringly sticking to the traditionally falsified election procedures anyway. “They will send our rank and file stick election propaganda and explain where to make a cross while others

crash over the real future division of power over Russia.” In 1996, this division of roles between capital and its auxiliary stabilising forces within the established Communist party were amounting to a farce, indeed. It was clear for all insiders that Zyuganov and the Communist Party of the Russian federation had factually won the election for presidency. Nonetheless, Zyuganov would negotiate a deal, conceding victory to El’cin and negotiating a strong Duma fraction instead. It was in this year, that Larissa’s father had finally torn apart his party membership card. But he retained the little container for it. When Larissa was already on a masters course for Politology in Moscow and taking the final steps to become a member of the Communist party with the help of two Barnaul comrades, he would pass over his empty container, so that she might use it on her further way through politics. This way lead her to work in the State Duma. She is active, 18 hours a day as it seems, and even a considerable part of her modest Bijsk holidays for a parttime member of the Chamber, the delegate for Omsk. As a blind man, he is entitled to get help from 4 assistants altogether. His main concern is educational policies. “And we have done a deal just before going on holidays ourselves,” Larissa would admit guiltily. “Why?” “The student holidays were on and the government was putting on a most perfidious reform to be able to privatise higher education assets against the constitution, declaring them to be ‘independent’ instead of ‘state’.” According to an old compromise negotiated with the privatisation mafia of El’cin times, you cannot privatise state higher education. But you could, formally, do just the same by declaring state higher education to be independent.” “So what was your deal?” “We analysed our potential to mobilise against this attack. It was well-timed indeed. We would have to mobilise student resistance right in the great

break of the summer. It would have been an up-hill battle indeed, but we would have done that, if need be. And probably with very poor results. So, we made Zyuganov call Putin.” “The leader of the Communist party talks to the head of a capitalist dictatorship on the phone?” “What do you think, they are part of the establishment. They have to be in close contact to do business. So we used that to threaten and Putin resigned to force it through this summer already.” “What is the compromise about it. That is the way we worked at Greenpeace to stop the most disgusting multinationals doing worse than average. It is normal campaigning within the ruling set of power. That would be the way for a possible take-off, I hoped as long as I still hoped for Greenpeace.” “But mind, we did a deal. We promised to stop our public attacks.” “It did however combine well to allow you a little holiday once in the year, didn’t it?”

The work with the regional Komsomolsk association, a structure independent of party membership, heads in a different direction though. Formally you should leave the association at the age of 28, normally to become a party member then. Functionaries can stay until the age of 40. There is that general problem of youth organisations that youth does not stay young in a numerical sense of the word and ageist limits are inadequate to define a political working space anyway. I got the impression, that youth is a code word for radical. Young communists in Russia are radical communists. Not, though, in the understanding of the party. The youth secretary of the party would not bother to come out into the rain until the very last day. He hardly arrived in time to precede the police which was already heavily insisting on the party apparatus to betray the location of the venue.

Contemporary Communist Youth in Russia clearly flirts with the concept of anti-capitalist guerrilla. This flirt may be false, it may be a hype, it may be necessary and it is certainly acutely dangerous for all of us involved. Concepts of Maoist inspired advancements from outside of the highly privatised metropolitan and industrial strongholds, as in the cases of Cuba 1958 or Columbia today, have a definite importance, even in more reflected analytical discussions. This can be due to the fact that the industrial base of the country has been actually reduced to a third-world-country. All the time, there is still a relatively high level of professional education on the one hand and natural resources to be exploited for hardly processed and little value-generating exports.

20. advancing within a collective of brilliant practice

From the stop of the river boat to the camp site, we had to go some three hours through the woods stretching without interruption over more than a hundred kilometres between Barnaul and Bijsk. Our colleague V. was already waiting at the pier. He has made the way to us and back with us to a total of 6 hours walking for letting us have some company during the last part of our trip. Though he is approaching 50 years of age and has some problems with his spine, he would positively want to take my my rucksack containing a clarinet, a computer and many other heavy things I had hardly the occasion or the peace of mind to use during the ensuing 4 days.

Beside our domestic tasks, there were be presentations and discussions and , most important, simulation games. We simulated how to organise a semi-legal street-action with a hell of a lot of police around and activist rank-and-files infested with spies and provocateurs. In one word, training for political basics in today's Russia. We got police beatings and unfair trials. We were even shown by the hilarious invention of the police actors how easy it is to smuggle Marihuana into someone's possession to lock him away for really long. Well, that detail failed to strike me as anything new, to be honest. For the next day, some even thought about simulating feudal society for one day. This would not be put into practice. I am still more sorry for the aborted simulation of communist society during at least one day. It did not take place either. To be honest, we had the possibility in our hands to make it really happen. All the factors of late capitalism in Russia were there: a marginalised proletariat, hidden away in the woods, the place around the fireside being out for sale. Alcohol as a revenue for policemen, arresting people unwilling to work for a soup a day. Somehow, I fell into the role of a producer of cultural trash for sale. These artefacts were partly hailing capitalism so bluntly that they would be smuggled into the prison by the wife of an oligarch, Natasha, to stir up rebellion. When I was finally arrested for subverting the existing order, I became friends with a group of rather intellectually aloof oppositional women. Making use of an amnesty before the staging of an election-farce by our rulers, we associated to form a politically operating opposition. All the while, we were ignorant about the working population. We did not really have them before our eyes, they were hidden away in their endless tasks of preparing meals they would hardly be allowed to

eat and getting firewood for a fire they could not afford to sit at.

In retrospect, I see this day as the consistent development of a most realist failure and in fact a perfect humiliation of our concept of the left without organically linking with working-class interest. Yet the course of action was still much more curved and indirect. Exactly in this crucial moment of building up the network to strike at the centre of power – the exploitative working relations – we were called off to attend the audience of Lower Altaj's member of Parliament. I do not recall his name. His appearance altogether was a farce. Politically and even as a mere counterpart for chat. I remember Larissa sitting deaf silent in defiance. He talked to us like a father after numerous strokes of Brezhnevian Alzheimer would to a bunch of kindergarten rascals who would not listen to him anyway. After the depute had taken the only sensible consequence and retreated to roar off with his four-wheel drive without really saying good-bye to anybody, I stormed to Larissa to open her mouth for the first time in half an hour. After all this was the kind of people, she was sacrificing her years for, with the exception of those lonely two fraction members outside of the Communist party discipline, the only one's you can call left within GosDuma in any sensible understanding of the word. And still, Larissa was a party member. How did this compare to the anti-climax we had just witnessed? "This type of men," she would slowly say and I could hear a bitter undercurrent in her speech, "are actually good-natured, still." I opened up my ears. How would she set the nail. She set it brilliantly. Nothing would remain to be said about this any more for the rest of the camp. "With their stories and opinions," she continued, slowly, taking up verve and speed, "they should be sent to a

men-only fishing afternoon. But not to parliament, for Christ's sake!"

We resumed our play as if having returned from the toilet. Nobody lost a word on the procedure. Yet, to give true account for colleagues in the West, who will inevitably condemn me for socialising with "Zyuganov" youth at all, I should take the pain to note the following. This representative of hundreds of thousands of Communist votes rallied by 4000 party members in Lower Altaj had displayed utmost satisfaction with the military policy of the regime. He had expressed his personal feeling of gratitude to the Putin administration, for using professional soldiers to kill and get killed in one of the most profitable money-machines of the Russian mafia, the fake-war in Chechnya. Nonetheless, he praised himself for pressuring the government to increase the percentage of compulsory conscripts in the Russian army. Nonetheless, he had a concept for the careers of young women to vote for him as well. He had claimed all female bodies in the camp-site as legitimate baby-producing machines for satisfying his genuinely social-Darwinist passion about the need to multiply the Russian race. I guess that any slightly feminist audience in Western Europe would have positively lynched him at that point. Yet, upon request from the audience, he had contradicted any political preference for working-class interests, and instead handed out the word of order to make class-alliance against class interests for the sake of "Russia's future". And finally, he issued an unlimited declaration in favour of "internationalism, as long as it keeps to the borders of the Russian Federation". With Russians being more than 80%, he argued, such "Internationalism" was to be had at a reasonably cheap price. With his mind-set, socialisation and materially

motivated business-interests in big politics, I would not be sure to tell, if in Germany he would have still found a place on the right wing of the potentially crypto-Fascist Christian Alliance, CDU. He was definitely not the kind of person, I would personally want to spare from red terror once the time was ripe.

As if suffering under a mental strain after this encounter, our oppositional gathering focussed its potential purely on participating in elections, now. We would set up a woman candidate and a monitor to be able to lobby for a more or less fair election process. When asked about a programme, our candidate issued the slogan of “free access to the fire-side for our peer-group (tusovka)”. I was a bit disappointed but supported her, nevertheless. Then however, she and three of her friends would suddenly drop out of the game. They actually claimed to feel offended by an intervention from Larissa moderating the course of the action from within. To provide some stabilising impact, Larissa urged us all to behave loyally “until lunch”. Lunch actually, would never come within the game, it was not on the agenda, just as a Communist party election victory. She was a brilliant player. To fix our minds on a trifle instead, she accused us of stealing the blowing horn to call for meals. She called our behaviour quite unfair and issued a call for more social responsibility at the campsite towards us. These 3 minutes were enough to deactivate what was left of a Left opposition in the game. The girls dispersed and took to sneer right until night, not eating anything that day actually.

The night was unique, I can tell you. The fire was lighted in an unprecedented intensity, obviously the working-class had found an outlet in their anger, being abandoned by the left butterflies in retreat. They had been working like hell.

Asked why, they said, they had no free time to rally for rebellion but they would have positively reacted to anyone looking for them in the woods. And now we were burning the fruit of their labour to reflect the outcome of the day. In the end of the game, we had actually been witnessing the making of a perfect coup-d'état by an orange mafia. They had accumulated incredible piles of money and were showing it with a breathtaking new-Russian sophistication, right in their press-conferences transmitted by local TV. You could see them operate with arbitrary imprisonment, not paying promised wages and organising support with hilarious corruption. And what was most irritating, we could not do anything to stop them. I really did feel transported from present Russia to bloody Ukraine towards the end. It was all hyper-real. Only one fifth of it was planned and intrigued by the moderation, the rest was just the combined social ability of all participants at work, including the leftish butterfly fraction out for a sneering stroll while a veritable neo-liberal putsch was taking over command and control of all resources around. There were three summaries of the day, which took my breath away: Sasha, Larissa and Aleksej. I could not make it out for sure. All of them were standing in the most inconvenient side of the fire, where the wind was blowing the smoke. Were they holding their improvises speeches in tears because of the smoke beating their eyes or was there more to it? Suddenly, I realised, that I was not the only one to shed tears in this camp. But my three colleagues were not getting passionate for an aborted dance. They were right at their heart of their year-long work in the movement. Why had we failed? Sasha said in almost perfect accordance with my own assessment, that there was no reason to sneer at our sneering left, it was the perfect representation of us all, failing to initiate a process of proletarian self-empowerment. Larissa all the

while kept on asking questions. Cutting questions. Personal questions. Relentless questions. My whits would have faltered as well under such an inquiry. Why are you in the Communist youth? What did you want here? Why did you come here? A girl gave in to the group pressure and admitted blushing, that she had come just to have a rest. I later walked up to her and told her, that my motivation was pretty much the same plus some personal affection. But that should not prevent us to learn some useful political lessons on the way, should it? I doubt whether my sincerity helped her in any way.

The last one was Aleksej to have his say, the Agronome colleague from behind the Ural. Hardly noticeable though, he, too, was sobbing. This was not a game any more. This was about the mere sense of our lives. I had painted a portrait of him just before, in the evening light. Now, I could investigate his expression with some experience already. He is a great agitator without knowing it. He is too humble to know it and that is perfectly o.k. He combines vivid emotion with the fruits of extensive reading in Marxism and theoretical reflection within daily political work. I decided to take advantage of the fact, that he belonged to my company in Larissa's tent. I was looking forward to a bright night of discussion.

21. a theory of progress reconstructed

There were endless memories and personal findings to be localised in a broader context lying side to side while Sasha and Larissa were already sleeping, were they really? Basically, I knew the theoretical position of Aleksey's Marxism-Leninism only from literature. Empirically, it can hardly be found in the movement's open debate in Western Europe.

I had been studying it for the last 18 years, though, starting after a school excursion to Jaroslav in the Soviet Union in 1988 brought extensive literature into our provincial circles.

I will not give a complete account of the night-long discussion we had, for it is by far not over yet. I know it to make a redefinition of my life's political struggles, failures and achievements necessary and this is one reason why I sat down for 8 consecutive days to write down this diary and could not do it in 4 hours as I had honestly planned it, even with a consecutive train to Tomsk in mind for the same day. 4 hours turned into 80 hours and I have but recorded some turbulences at the surface of my reflection and self-critique. Surely, the impact of Aleksej would have been less fruitful for my quest if I had not had three more days close to my friend V. in the following. Aleksej is of my age and has talked my line of study in the beginning of the 1990s, just 3000 km east. V. was born in 1958 and has a sound and thorough political and personal socialisation within a Soviet Union that presented a real chance and a real threat. His assessment of proletarian dictatorship, theoretical tasks ahead, and central hermeneutical issues are more sound and more poignant with empiric disillusion than our grossly improvising reinvention after the devastation of Capitalist victories over the last 15 years. And there is Larissa, whom I trust to the twinkle of her eyes. I still cannot quite understand how she can possibly be that childish and serious in the meantime, so sophisticated and serene in treating one and the same task. Will they be able to break her? My hope, as the hope of many lies in Moscow. Not buried under glass in a red marble shrine but in our own doing next winter and in the years to come.

22. swimming off in more than tears

It was painful for me to leave the camp with Larissa dissolving into tears under incessant, continuing rain. The ways through the woods were turning into the fifth, the Russian element on earth, which had driven Napoleon to the edge of his senses: mud, mud, mud. Yet, I was so glad to be close to her on a scale measurable in metres for those last hours. I would indeed not have a clue, what will happen to me once this connection was cut.

23. rebeginning in Barnaul: fresco, Francesco, Ionesco

I started to work on a fresco painting in V's Lower Altaj youth centre. It was to sum up the last fortnight and I worked to do it well with a fervour and intensity I had really started to miss in all this deconcentrating travelling activity, since the last fresco with Vlasta in the German Commune KoWa in June this year.

24. hitch-hiking into most unexpected gardening

Together with V., we had a hilarious period of research to collect material from memory, archives, museums and expositions, films and photographs, artist's shops and building-trade discounters in Barnaul. Within 36 hours, we got almost everything, wet lime, sand of different colours, excellent and simple fresco brushes right to the history of

communes in the region from the 1920s onward, faces from the revolutionary wars in Barnaul, a critique of the political economics of Soviet political police from local life experience and a view of Soviet industry in the scale of thousands of hectares damped to rubbles. How should I put it all together? I was increasingly getting worried collecting all these sketches and complex insights.

There was actually only one trifle, we could not get at all: red pigment. In the end, we drove out on Saturday evening the slightly doubtful address of an artist, someone had given us out of commiseration. This proved to be the clue. V. and I happened to sneak into a party which had an unconcealed explosive eroticism written on the foreheads of everybody welcoming us. For Russia, the social set was very unusual, formal couples, parting with new friendships in all directions. But somehow and very little inkeeping with the mode in which Russians including my Ukrainian acquaintance break private relations and parentship, this was somehow all holding together. All this was happening clearly on the edges of possible personal tolerance and yet the drive for transgression of any bourgeois norms had V. and me electrified within minutes. A woman, the widow of a plavčik who had drowned in the Altaj waters was dancing alone in the wild garden among a company preparing the banja. I joined her and we turned around and around until seeing nothing of the world any more but in our mutual glances. She delicately took to rubbing off the rests of building lime and sand on my cheeks while turning and turning with me, inquiring. "You think it so easy to get some lies from me and sleep with me this night and think it all to be perfect?" she asked as if singing the text to the tune we were dancing. "A friend of mine is having a night out today in the Carpathians, that's for sure, with a new and

quite superficial lover,” I retorted. “How superficial?” We turned. “She would not be able to tell me.” “That means she does not really love you?” “Possible.” She searched with her eyes in my eyes. Suddenly, she had got me with a little sly, ringing laugh. “So you see it all fall.” “I am falling myself, it is little fun.” “Be calm,” she said with the burden of a dead man having been her husband, “you will only grow from it.” “How can I possibly grow, how can I possibly realise the Commune, when every friendship goes through my helpless fingers as if really restless to go down the drain?” “Be calm, your soul will only grow from it.” We had ceased to dance now. We were in the far end of the wild garden, holding our hands fast. I have no experience with such kind of encounters, really, apart of stupid dreams. But this was neither a dream, nor was it stupid as far as I understood it. Maybe this was even a realisation to stop talking? “Do I have a soul?” I said naively as if she could tell. She twisted me back with analytical sharpness: “So, you are an atheist. How good to hear that. You have some experience then with coming to terms with what you cannot flee from.” Nothing remained to be said. I felt perfectly understood. And in the same second, I unwillingly repeated a phrase to myself which I had unexpectedly written down in a schoolmistress’ fit to end a letter to Olga in Moscow: “Remember that you do not built new society with romance. What we need is collective action to deconstruct patriarchy. Have a nice summer, yours”

My companion in the garden was incredibly drunk and in the meantime behaving breathtakingly sly alongside, incredibly sure of herself, her words, her body, her movements. She chose to talk about the death of her lover, then. I heard it with horror. Having lived with a woman for a decade that had seen the early deaths of two of her

brothers, one of them a plavčik, I immediately sensed that her talking was not what she would talk in the years and some hundreds of occasions before. Forget about fresco painting tonight, if you really heed to this vicinity, I muttered to myself. And it was in this moment that I broke in, just for half a second. With a little sting of guilt, I thought about my comrade. I could not help it. Later he would try to help me in return, but it was all lost and gone. Why did I understand that so much earlier than him with roughly 13 years less experience? For the fraction of a second, I lost hold of her eyes and my eyes flared off to look into the other side of the garden to see whether my comrade was having quite such a thrilling time as me out here. I could not tell but I had some doubts. This was enough to kill off any further interest in me within her mind. She had opened up to tell me about her experience of closest death and I had not been able to hold her glance in the meantime. So inevitably, I had lost her confidence altogether. Our bodies were still intimate but her mind was gaining distance at a breathtaking speed. She took her girlfriend and my comrade in her arms and brought us three into V's car. A little boy was with us, the son of her girlfriend. I was sorry for him. Drunken parents relating strangely to strange people are not necessarily a comforting support when need be. We drove to her girl-friends home. My comrade readily bought them another bottle of vodka on request. I wouldn't have done that. In the widow's talk, there was now a solid hatred for her own drinking sticking out sharply against her ambition to have us buy more... and there was suddenly an explicit adjacent hatred for me as I registered from a distance. V. to the contrary, would be shocked. Quite pathetically, he resolved to throw in everything he had in store for me. Most interesting for my ears to hear though was that he advised her to stop talking

Russian with me. Already in the Ural, I had felt the intuitive sensation that my Russian was really a lousy failure, because I wanted more demanding a closeness and mutuality than sex. "Honestly," my comrade pleaded while I silently winced under his implicit verdict in the agony of acute language isolation, "try to speak to him in English for the rest of the night, you will see what he is really up to." This is unnecessary, I thought pleadingly. She hates me already, just as any Russian has the right to hate a German, and you make it worse with your advertisement. Actually, she did not speak a word of English either, just some juicy German swear-words, but that would not be sufficient to restore her confidence. "Don't tell me you have, let's say, a million." She now declaimed all cold. "Do you think I would do it for less? You two do not really look like busyness ones. Why should I socialise with you anyway?" V. underlined with a truly ridiculous honesty in his voice that he had not that bad a nice car if she would just bother to take a look and that we weren't actually underdressed for a garden party. I remembered that he had reminded me three times to make some effort and change my work-clothes with anything slightly worth to be shown around in Saturday night Barnaul. I smiled a tacit and previously unknown smile at this competition taking place between the two now. Was this still about me, really? It seemed as if they were summing up the main concerns of Russian middle classes over the last 15 years. Now, the ugly term middle class sounds a bit like the church bell back in the village of my parents. I did a little arithmetic and arrived just at a million, Roubles that is. Well, this week. Next week, it would already be a painful bit closer to the end. I had no income for a year now. I would have liked to bring the conversation to a collapse with something of the like. But in the end, I was not familiar enough with this sphere of

Russian society to be able to tell whether she had meant Roubles or US Dollars. And anyway, we had reached a dead point some time ago already and maybe even V. would have misunderstood my irony.

Back in the garden, she inquired occasionally “can’t you just piss off?” I had seen this coming from the moment, I had lost sight of her, worrying about my comrade to feel uneasy and unheeded to in the garden. Honestly, we felt a bit uneasy both now. Later he told me, still with some agitation in his voice. “Oh, this type of women! Impossible. You have to take them like that.” The gesture he made then reminded me of how you catch a wild horse. I could not be less interested in such an acquisition. I preferred to say nothing.

We got the red pigment and went, not without exchanging hot kisses with the donor, a brilliant artist, heading off for Tibet. I reckon, I will not forget her either. No.

This garden was a miracle. It made you go through a decade in 20 minutes. It made you trust and not regret. It made you regret and trust yourself, my comrade, my colleague. If I lived in Barnaul, I would care very much for at least a little pie in this sky. There was just a tiny stint in the fabulous glasses, she fused and composed to precious interior designs. She obviously wanted to excuse the rudeness of her friend in kicking us out. “I have not actually invited them. She would confess to us unnecessarily “They always turn up by themselves.” There was a pause. “Like metastasis,” she added and smiled to us across this rather awkward metaphor sombrely and just a little uneasy, a little from underneath. With a pang of sudden speculative sadness, I realised that maybe she would

not see Tibet in this life any more, but I can be entirely mistaken. I noted that my comrade was taking down the contact details of my colleague, our benefactor, with remarkable care. But that, of course, was only to duly return a little plastic bag with some red pigment. She, however, would insist that we should just use it up or keep it.

25. dictatorship of the proletariat vs. a collage of abilities

Dictatorship of the proletariat is bull shit, really. Of course, the bourgeois grip on economic life has to be inversed. Of course, parliamentarism does provide no effective tool for dispossessing the dictatorship of Capital. But my dear V., could we really sneer at the expertise and unique abilities of her and him and the Young Communist pretending to have come three hours through the rain and mud for having a rest only? Dictatorship is rotten convention just as hierarchy is rotten convention. Let the grass yield on their ruins! Empowerment of the proletariat is essential, but that is a process you can neither buy with purchase power nor win over putting in place a command structure. All enhancements beyond participation would not get us any degree farther than another simulation. We know simulations of a Social Democrat and a Bolshevik making. We would now rather prefer the original in both cases, to be sure. New forms of proletarian public life, expression, control and self-management will be the water, in which empowerment, the jolly fish, will learn to swim, not the other way round.

We will not enter the same river which lead up to the failure of working-class emancipation in East and West once again. Maybe, we will investigate proletarian initiative and not oracle about it from a set of excerpts from bourgeois news-papers and theories about imperialism. We will try to form living and fighting collectives and not fighting and dying martyrs. We will not import industrial social models from the West any more, because the West has lost out to their suffocating productivity just the same by now.

Hence, we will integrate production and reproduction, guerrilla and conciliation tactics, cultural invention and industrious creativity on a new level of escalation. We will scatter the carcasses of gender and carry sexual liberation to the point where fulfilment is not to be had in bed any more. We will desexualise colloquial language and sexualise socialism instead. We will try to paralyse the reflexes of classism inside of us and toil to become free of toil altogether. We will not be modest. We will not be restrained. We will not be consumers of our own dreams. We will become what nobody has ever been. We will taste what everybody has been capable to dream of. We will be the graveyard orchestra of capital relations dancing to their very last rhythms.

26. sketches for a commune

Looking at historical communes can be instructive. Some initial collective, e.g. four or five communards, always had to make a start: condense their aspirations, expectations, experiences, differences, dreams, fears and needs. Such a crystallising process is essential to any further growth of the

network. A workable result is only worth to be evolved in collective practice. It could be a crystallising collective, living it and putting it down (i.e. in written, in documentation and decision hardware as Kommune Niederkaufungen e.g. has developed and passed on to other communes). As with tomorrow's weather, there can be individual forecasts. You will not hang down your head because the forecast was somewhat misleading, will you? Instead, you are perfectly right to do so if the weather actually turns out to be nasty. So I try and risk a forecast. It is nothing more than individual finger training for a future walk on our hands. To enhance specific reactions, I associate the ideas with letters making them more easy to cite.

- A) Our commune serves the people, aspiring to get beyond capital relations.
- B) A shared economy is essential for developing revolutionary ferment.
- C) Only if all available individual capital is collectivised, there can be some hope for a sufficient fund to work with responding to the abilities present in the collective.
- D) Economically, communes were mostly a failure as long as capitalism (or NEP) subsisted. The future quality of communal life and work has to compensate for this tendency in time.
- E) Shared work and life are the result and basis of a common political struggle.

- F) Latin America is as important a weak element in the chain of imperialism as the former Soviet Union. A wandering commune e.g., doing mainly analytical work to support class struggles in Latin America for some years could be more interesting than developing a farm on the Crimean Peninsula.
- G) Hierarchy is a waste of talents.
- H) Consensus decision making is the supreme tool for equal empowerment. But specific procedures have to be set up for treating vetoes adequately.
- I) Levelling economic possibilities is a primordial task. This means resigning from material benefits for most of us.
- J) The quality of life and work facilitated by the commune is to remunerate according to real material need. Therefore, collectively set up priorities distribute irrespective of the amount of individual sacrifices, voluntary workload and income generating initiative.
- K) The material realisation of women's liberation has to be always three steps ahead of any attempts at sexual liberation.
- L) Everybody should be able to do any task in the commune.
- M) Racism, Sexism, Classism, Ageism, Homophobia and any kind of violence inside of the commune, including structural and symbolic violence (anche gridare, also to raise your voice above the

necessary to make yourself acoustically understood) are not acceptable. Reproductive work and the assignment of unpopular tasks have to be counter-imposed to gender roles and genderised behaviour patterns.

- N) Affirmative action is a primordial principle when rebalancing gender biases, class background biases and accumulated potentials to realise hierarchies.
- O) Equal or affirmative distribution of reproductive tasks could be monitored minutely, i.e. to the very minute.
- P) Empirically, communes live on a politically acceptable deception: People enter them as a life engagement and in most cases their very stability in time depends on individuals drifting in and out.
- Q) Fluctuation is experienced as individual failure, nevertheless. The communal structure has to put aside resources to provide for relief.
- R) The most convincing way to deal with fluctuation in a shared economy is to make up individual exit contracts between single members and the commune as a whole (Kommune Niederkaufungen).
- S) These contracts should at all costs be agreed on before splitting becomes an issue to resolve conflicts at all.
- T) Exit payment expectation by the commune should not be based on the concept of profit-sharing

(ZuverdienerInnengemeinschaft, artel). Parallel to all decisions on consumption and investment inside the commune, exit payments will be based on a collectively shared assessment and prioritisation of material needs.

- U) With the Capitalist market providing easier work and better pay for men than for women, no exit contract for a man should envision a higher exit support sum than the lowest agreed on for a woman and there should be no lower for a woman than the highest fixed for a man.
- V) Ageism and Internism (snobbish attitudes based on the length of internship) are not helpful.
- W) Admission procedures for people joining the commune after crystallisation should be transparent, stick to clear rules and be subject to unbiased control. There is no reason for those who joined earlier to build up any sense of superiority.
- X) Even a guest for three days can make more serious and important a contribution than regulars. The common classist division between full members and guests is to be levelled without giving in to consumption patterns of the fast-food society.
- Y) Children get adopted by the commune as a whole. Biological parenthood is only an issue when dealing with the outside. Hierarchy in care and responsibility is to be analysed and understood as a deficiency in the working of the commune. Children can be expected to want to leave the

commune at first occasion. They should therefore be empowered to realise exit contracts on special terms and retain a special guest status.

- Z) The material integrity of the commune can be highly elastic if the social dynamic is empowered to support physical distance. The Gudut example shows that proletarian work and partisan activism can be combined with the concept of rural settlement as well as cosmopolitan participation in one single integrating shared economy (Palestine (1919) 1924 until 1927 when a part left for the Soviet Union).
- and) There is always something very important you forget to write down in the end.